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The Hibelungen Lied

An Essay

By

Thomas Carlyle



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THE NIBELUNGEN LIED.*

BY THOMAS CARLYLE.

IN the year 1757, the Swiss Professor Bodmer printed an ancient poetical manuscript, under the title of "Chriemhilden Rache und die Klage" ("Chriemhilde's Revenge, and the Lament"); which may be considered as the first of a series, or stream of publications and speculations still rolling on, with increased current, to the present day. Not, indeed, that all these had their source or determining cause in so insignificant

* *Westminster Review*, No. 29.—"Das Nibelungen Lied," übersetzt von Karl Simrock ("The Nibelungen Lied," translated by Karl Simrock). 2 vols. 12mo. Berlin, 1827

a circumstance ; their source, or rather thousand sources, lay far elsewhere. As has often been remarked, a certain antiquarian tendency in literature, a fonder, more earnest looking back into the Past, began about that time to manifest itself in all nations (witness our own "Percy's Reliques"): this was among the first distinct symptoms of it in Germany ; where, as with ourselves, its manifold effects are still visible enough.

Some fifteen years after Bodmer's publication, which, for the rest, is not celebrated as an editorial feat, one C. H. Müller undertook a "Collection of German Poems from the Twelfth, Thirteenth, and Fourteenth Centuries" ; wherein, among other articles, he reprinted Bodmer's "Chriemhilde" and "Klage," with a highly remarkable addition prefixed to the former, essen-

tial indeed to the right understanding of it; and the whole now stood before the world as one Poem, under the name of the "Nibelungen Lied," or "Lay of the Nibelungen." It has since been ascertained that the "Klage" is a foreign appendage; at best, related only as epilogue to the main work. Meanwhile out of this "Nibelungen," such as it was, there soon proceeded new inquiries and kindred enterprises. For much as the Poem, in the shape it here bore, was defaced and marred, it failed not to attract observation: to all open-minded lovers of poetry, especially where a strong patriotic feeling existed, the singular antique "Nibelungen" was an interesting appearance. Johannes Müller, in his famous "Swiss History," spoke of it in warm terms; subsequently, August Wilhelm Schlegel, through the medium of the

“Deutsche Museum,” succeeded in awakening something like a universal popular feeling on the subject ; and, as a natural consequence, a whole host of Editors and Critics, of deep and of shallow endeavor, whose labors we yet see in progress. The “Nibelungen” has now been investigated, translated, collated, commented upon, with more or less result, to almost boundless lengths ; besides the Work named at the head of this Paper, and which stands there simply as one of the latest, we have Versions into the modern tongue by Von der Hagen, by Hinsberg, Lachmann, Büsching, Zeune, the last in Prose, and said to be worthless ; Criticisms, Introductions, Keys, and so forth, by innumerable others, of whom we mention only Docen and the Brothers Grimm.

By which means, not only has the

Poem itself been elucidated with all manner of researches, but its whole environment has come forth in new light ; the scene and personages it relates to, the other fictions and traditions connected with it, have attained a new importance and coherence. Manuscripts, that for ages have lain dormant, have issued from their archives into public view ; books that had circulated only in mean guise for the amusement of the people, have become important, not to one or two virtuosos, but to the general body of the learned : and now a whole System of antique Teutonic Fiction and Mythology unfolds itself, shedding here and there a real though feeble and uncertain glimmer over what was once the total darkness of the old Time. No fewer than Fourteen ancient Traditional Poems, all strangely inter-

twisted, and growing out of and into one another, have come to light among the Germans ; who now, in looking back, find that they too, as well as the Greeks, have their Heroic Age, and round the old Valhalla, as their Northern Pantheon, a world of demi-gods and wonders.

Such a phenomenon, unexpected till of late, cannot but interest a deep-thinking, enthusiastic people. For the “ Nibelungen ” especially, which lies as the centre and distinct keystone of the whole too chaotic System,—let us say rather, blooms as a firm sunny island in the middle of these cloud-covered, ever-shifting sand-whirlpools, — they cannot sufficiently testify their love and veneration. Learned professors lecture on the “ Nibelungen ” in public schools, with a praiseworthy view to initiate the German youth in love of

their father-land ; from many zealous and nowise ignorant critics we hear talk of a “ great Northern Epos,” of a “ German Iliad ” ; the more saturnine are shamed into silence, or hollow mouth-homage. Thus from all quarters comes a sound of joyful acclamation ; the “ Nibelungen ” is welcomed as a precious national possession, recovered after six centuries of neglect, and takes undisputed place among the sacred books of German literature.

Of these curious transactions some rumor has not failed to reach us in England, where our minds, from their own antiquarian disposition, were willing enough to receive it. Abstracts and extracts of the “ Nibelungen ” have been printed in our language ; there have been disquisitions on it in our Reviews ; hitherto, however, such as nowise to exhaust the subject. On

the contrary, where so much was to be told at once, the speaker might be somewhat puzzled where to begin. It was a much readier method to begin with the end, or with any part of the middle, than like Hamilton's Ram (whose example is too little followed in literary narrative) to begin with the beginning. Thus has our stock of intelligence come rushing out on us quite promiscuously and pellmell; whereby the whole matter could not but acquire a tortuous, confused, altogether inexplicable and even dreary aspect; and the class of "well-informed persons" now find themselves in that uncomfortable position, where they are obliged to profess admiration, and at the same time feel that, except by name, they know not what the thing admired is. Such a position towards the venerable "Nibelungen," which

is no less bright and graceful than historically significant, cannot be the right one. Moreover, as appears to us, it might be somewhat mended by very simple means. Let any one that has honestly read the "Nibelungen," which in these days is no surprising achievement, only tell us what he found there, and nothing that he did not find. We should then know something, and, what were still better, be ready for knowing more. To search out the secret roots of such a production, ramified through successive layers of centuries, and drawing nourishment from each, may be work, and too hard work, for the deepest philosopher and critic ; but to look with natural eyes on what part of it stands visibly above ground, and record his own experiences thereof, is what any reasonable mortal, if he will take heed, can do.

Some such slight service we here intend proffering to our readers. Let them glance with us a little into that mighty maze of Northern Archæology ; where, it may be, some pleasant prospects will open. If the " Nibelungen " is what we have called it, a firm sunny island amid the weltering chaos of antique tradition, it must be worth visiting on general grounds ; nay, if the primeval rudiments of it have the antiquity assigned them, it belongs especially to us English *Teutones* as well as to the German.

Far be it from us, meanwhile, to venture rashly, or farther than is needful, into that same traditionary chaos, fondly named the " Cycle of Northern Fiction," with its Fourteen Sectors (or separate Poems), which are rather Fourteen shoreless Limbos, where we hear of pieces containing " a hundred

thousand verses," and "seventy thousand verses," as of a quite natural affair! How travel through that inane country; by what art discover the little grain of Substance that casts such multiplied immeasurable Shadows? The primeval Mythos, were it at first philosophical truth, or were it historical incident, floats too vaguely on the breath of men: each successive Singer and Redactor furnishes it with new personages, new scenery, to please a new audience; each has the privilege of inventing, and the far wider privilege of borrowing and new-modelling from *all* that have preceded him. Thus, though Tradition may have but one root, it grows like a Banian, into a whole over-arching labyrinth of trees. Or rather might we say, it is a Hall of Mirrors, where in pale light each mirror reflects, convexly or concavely,

not only some real Object, but the Shadows of this in other mirrors ; which again do the like for it ; till in such reflection and re-reflection the whole immensity is filled with dimmer and dimmer shapes ; and no firm scene lies around us, but a dislocated, distorted chaos, fading away on all hands, in the distance, into utter night. Only to some brave Von der Hagen, furnished with indefatigable ardor, and a deep, almost religious love, is it given to find sure footing there, and see his way. All those “ Dukes of Aquitania,” therefore, and Etzel’s “ Court-holdings,” and “ Dietrichs,” and “ Sigenots,” we shall leave standing where they are. Such as desire farther information will find an intelligible account of the whole Series or Cycle, in Messrs. Weber and Jamieson’s “ Illustrations of Northern Antiquities ” ;

and all possible furtherance in the numerous German works above alluded to ; among which Von der Hagen's writings, though not the readiest, are probably the safest guides. But for us, our business here is with the "Nibelungen," the inhabited poetic country round which all these wildernesses lie ; only as environments of which, as routes to which, are they of moment to us. Perhaps our shortest and smoothest route will be through the "Heldenbuch" ("Hero-book") ; which is greatly the most important of these subsidiary Fictions, not without interest of its own, and closely related to the "Nibelungen." This "Heldenbuch," therefore, we must now address ourselves to traverse with all despatch. At the present stage of the business, too, we shall forbear any historical inquiry and argu-

ment concerning the date and local habitation of those Traditions ; reserving what little is to be said on that matter till the Traditions themselves have become better known to us. Let the reader, on trust for the present, transport himself into the twelfth or thirteenth century ; and therefrom looking back into the sixth or fifth, see what presents itself.

Of the “ Heldenbuch,” tried on its own merits, and except as illustrating that other far worthier Poem, or at most as an old national, and still in some measure popular book, we should have felt strongly inclined to say, as the Curate in “ Don Quixote ” so often did, *Al corral con ello*, Out of window with it ! Doubtless there are touches of beauty in the work, and even a sort of heartiness and antique quaintness in its wildest follies ; but on the whole that

George-and-Dragon species of composition has long ceased to find favor with any one ; and except for its groundwork, more or less discernible, of old Northern Fiction, this "Heldenbuch" has little to distinguish it from these. Nevertheless, what is worth remark, it seems to have been a far higher favorite than the "Nibelungen" with ancient readers. It was printed soon after the invention of printing ; some think in 1472, for there is no place or date on the first edition ; at all events, in 1491, in 1509, and repeatedly since ; whereas the "Nibelungen," though written earlier, and in worth immeasurably superior, had to remain in manuscript three centuries longer. From which, for the thousandth time, inferences might be drawn as to the infallibility of popular taste, and its value as a criterion for poetry.

However, it is probably in virtue of this neglect, that the "Nibelungen" boasts of its actual purity ; that it now comes before us, clear and graceful as it issued from the old singer's head and heart ; not overloaded with Ass-eared Giants, Fiery Dragons, Dwarfs, and Hairy Women, as the "Heldenbuch" is, many of which, as charity would hope, may be the produce of a later age than that famed "Swabian Era," to which these poems, as we now see them, are commonly referred. Indeed, one Casper von Roen is understood to have passed the whole "Heldenbuch" through his limbec, in the fifteenth century ; but like other rectifiers, instead of purifying it, to have only drugged it with still fiercer ingredients to suit the sick appetite of the time.

Of this drugged and adulterated "Hero-book" (the only one we yet

have, though there is talk of a better) we shall quote the long Title-page of Lessing's Copy, the edition of 1560 ; from which, with a few intercalated observations, the reader's curiosity may probably obtain what little satisfaction it wants :

Das Heldenbuch, welchs auff's new corrigirt und gebessert ist, mit schönen Figuren geziert. Gedrückt zu Frankfurt am Mayn, durch Weygand Han und Sygmund Feyerabend, etc. That is to say :

“ The ‘ Hero-book,’ which is of new corrected and improved, adorned with beautiful Figures. Printed at Frankfurt on the Mayn, through Weygand Han and Sygmund Feyerabend.

“ *Part First* saith of Kaiser Ottnit and the little King Elberich, how they with great peril, over sea, in Heathendom, won from a king his daughter

(and how he in lawful marriage took her to wife).”

From which announcement the reader already guesses the contents: how this little King Elberich was a Dwarf or Elf, some half-span long, yet full of cunning practices and the most helpful activity; nay, stranger still, had been Kaiser Ottnit of *Lampartei* or Lombardy's father,—having had his own ulterior views in that indiscretion. How they sailed with Messina ships, into Paynim land; fought with that unspeakable Turk, King Machabol, in and about his fortress and metropolis of Montebur, which was all stuck round with Christian heads; slew from seventy to a hundred thousand of the infidels at one heat; saw the lady on the battlements; and at length, chiefly by Dwarf Elberich's help, carried her off in triumph; wedded her in Messina;

and without difficulty, rooting out the Mohammedan prejudice, converted her to the creed of Mother Church. The fair runaway seems to have been of a gentle, tractable disposition, very different from old Machabol; concerning whom it is here chiefly to be noted that Dwarf Elberich, rendering himself invisible on their first interview, plucks out a handful of hair from his chin, thereby increasing to a tenfold pitch the royal choler; and, what is still more remarkable, furnishing the poet Wieland, six centuries afterwards, with the critical incident in his "Oberon." As for the young lady herself, we cannot but admit that she was well worth sailing to Heathendom for, and shall here, as our sole specimen of that old German doggerel, give the description of her as she first appeared on the battlements during the fight; subjoining a

version as verbal and literal as the plainest prose can make it. Considered as a detached passage, it is, perhaps, the finest we have met with in the "Heldenbuch."

*Ihr herz brann also schone,
Recht als ein rot rubein,
Gleich dem vollen mone
Gaben ihr äuglein schein.
Sich hett die maget reine
Mit Rosen wohl bekleid
Und auch mit berlin kleine;
Niemand da tröst die meid.*

Her heart burnt (with anxiety) as beautiful
Just as a red ruby,
Like the full moon
Her eyes (eyelings, pretty eyes) gave
sheen.
Herself had the maiden pure
Well adorned with roses,
And also with pearls small :
No one there comforted the maid.

*Sie war schön an dem leibe,
Und zu den seiten schmal ;
Recht als ein kertze scheibe
Wohlgeschaffen überall :
Ihr beyden händ gemeine
Dars ihr gentz nichts gebrach ;
Ihr näglein schön und reine,
Das man sich darin besach.*

She was fair of body,
And in the waist slender ;
Right as a (golden) candlestick
Well-fashioned everywhere :
Her two hands proper,
So that she wanted nought :
Her little nails fair and pure,
That you could see yourself therein.

*Ihr har war schön umbfangen
Mit edler seiden fein ;
Das liess sie nieder hangen,
Das hübsche magedlein.
Sie trug ein kron mit steinen,
Sie war von gold so rot ;
Elberich dem viel kleinen
War zu der magte not.*

Her hair was beautifully girt
With noble silk (band) fine ;
She let it flow down,
The lovely maidling.
She wore a crown with jewels,
It was of gold so red :
For Elberich the very small
The maid had need (to console her).

*Da vornen in den kronen
Lag ein karfunkelstein,
Der in dem pallast schonen
Aecht als ein kertz erschein ;
Auf jrem haupt das hare
War lauter und auch fein,
Es leuchtet also klare
Recht als der sonnen schein.*

There in front of the crown
Lay a carbuncle-stone,
Which in the palace fair
Even as a taper seemed ;
On her head the hair
Was glossy and also fine,
It shone as bright
Even as the sun's sheen.

*Die magt die stand alleine,
Gar trawrig war jr mut ;
Ihr farb und die war reine,
Lieblich we milch und blut ;
Her durch jr zöpffe reinen
Schien jr hals als der schnee :
Elberich dem viel kleinen
That der maget jammer weh.*

The maid she stood alone,
Right sad was her mind ;
Her color it was pure,
Lovely as milk and blood ;
Out through her pure locks
Shone her neck like the snow.
Elberich the very small
Was touched with the maiden's sorrow.

Happy man was Kaiser Ottnit,
blessed with such a wife, after all his
travail ;—had not the Turk Machabol
cunningly sent him, in revenge, a box
of young Dragons, or Dragon-eggs, by
the hands of a caitiff Infidel, contriver

of the mischief; by whom in due course of time they were hatched and nursed, to the infinite woe of all Lam-partei, and ultimately to the death of Kaiser Ottnit himself, whom they swallowed and attempted to digest, once without effect, but the next time too fatally, crown and all !

“ *Part Second* announceth (*meldet*) of Herr Hugdietrich and his son Wolf-dietrich ; how they, for justice-sake, oft by their doughty acts succored distressed persons, with other bold heroes that stood by them in extremity.”

Concerning which Hugdietrich, Emperor of Greece, and his son Wolf-dietrich, one day the renowned Dietrich of Bern, we can here say little more than that the former trained himself to sempstress-work ; and for many weeks plied his needle, before he could get wedded and produce Wolfdietrich ;

who coming into the world in this clandestine manner, was let down into the castle-ditch, and like Romulus and Remus nursed by a Wolf, whence his name. However, after never-imagined adventures, with enchanters and enchantresses, pagans and giants, in all quarters of the globe, he finally, with utmost effort, slaughtered those Lombardy Dragons ; then married Kaiser Ottnit's widow, whom he had rather flirted with before ; and so lived universally respected in his new empire, performing yet other notable achievements. One strange property he had, sometimes useful to him, sometimes hurtful : that his breath, when he became angry, grew flame, red-hot, and would take the temper out of swords. We find him again in the " Nibelungen," among King Etzel's (Attila's) followers ; a staid, cautious, yet still

invincible man ; on which occasion, though with great reluctance, he is forced to interfere, and does so with effect. Dietrich is the favorite hero of all those Southern Fictions, and well acknowledged in the Northern also, where the chief man, however, as we shall find, is not he but Siegfried.

“ *Part Third* showeth of the Rose-garden at Worms, which was planted by Chrimhilde, King Gibich’s daughter ; whereby afterwards most part of those Heroes and Giants came to destruction and were slain.”

In this Third Part the Southern or Lombard Heroes come into contact and collision with another as notable Northern class, and for us much more important. Chriemhild, whose ulterior history makes such a figure in the “Nibelungen,” had, it would seem, near the ancient city of Worms, a

Rose-garden, some seven English miles in circuit ; fenced only by a silk thread ; wherein, however, she maintained Twelve stout fighting-men ; several of whom, as Hagen, Volker, her three Brothers, above all the gallant Siegfried her betrothed, we shall meet with again ; these, so unspeakable was their prowess, sufficed to defend the silk-thread Garden against all mortals. Our good antiquary, Von der Hagen, imagines that this Rose-garden business (in the primeval Tradition) glances obliquely at the Ecliptic with its Twelve Signs, at Jupiter's fight with the Titans, and we know not what confused skirmishing in the Utgard, or Asgard, or Midgard of the Scandinavians. Be this as it may, Chriemhild, we are here told, being very beautiful and very wilful, boasts, in the pride of her heart, that no he-

roes on earth are to be compared with hers; and hearing accidentally that Dietrich of Bern has a high character in this line, forthwith challenges him to visit Worms, and with eleven picked men to do battle there against those other Twelve champions of Christendom that watch her Rose-garden. Dietrich, in a towering passion at the style of the message, which was "surly and stout," instantly pitches upon his eleven seconds, who also are to be principals; and with a retinue of other sixty thousand, by quick stages, in which obstacles enough are overcome, reaches Worms, and declares himself ready. Among these eleven Lombard heroes of his are likewise several whom we meet with again in the "Nibelungen"; beside Dietrich himself, we have the old Duke Hildebrand, Wolfhart, Ortwin. Notable

among them, in another way, is Monk Ilzan, a truculent gray-bearded fellow, equal to any Friar Tuck in "Robin Hood."

The conditions of fight are soon agreed on : there are to be twelve successive duels, each challenger being expected to find his match ; and the prize of victory is a Rose-garland from Chriemhild and *ein Helssen und ein Küssen*, that is to say virtually, one kiss from her fair lips to each. But here, as it ever should do, Pride gets a fall ; for Chriemhild's bully-hecktors are, in divers ways, all successively felled to the ground by the Berners ; some of whom, as old Hildebrand, will not even take her Kiss when it is due ; even Siegfried himself, most reluctantly engaged with by Dietrich, and for a while victorious, is at last forced to seek shelter in her lap. Nay, Monk

Ilsan, after the regular fight is over, and his part in it well performed, calls out in succession fifty-two other idle Champions of the Garden, part of them Giants, and routs the whole fraternity, thereby earning, besides his own regular allowance, fifty-two spare Garlands and fifty-two several Kisses ; in the course of which latter, Chriemhild's cheek, a just punishment, as seemed, was scratched to the drawing of blood by his rough beard. It only remains to be added, that King Gibich, Chriemhild's Father, is now fain to do homage for his kingdom to Dietrich, who returns triumphant to his own country ; where also Monk Ilsan, according to promise, distributes these fifty-two Garlands among his fellow Friars, crushing a garland on the bare crown of each, till "the red blood ran over their ears." Under which hard but

not undeserved treatment they all agreed to pray for remission of Ilsan's sins ; indeed, such as continued refractory he tied together by the beards and hung pair-wise over poles, whereby the stoutest soon gave in.

So endeth here this ditty
Of strife from woman's pride :
God on our griefs take pity,
And Mary still by us abide.

“ In *Part Fourth* is announced (*gemelt*) of the little King Laurin, the Dwarf, how he encompassed his Rose-garden with so great manhood and art-magic, till at last he was vanquished by the heroes, and forced to become their Juggler, with etc., etc.”

Of which Fourth and, happily, last part we shall here say nothing, inasmuch as, except that certain of our old heroes again figure there, it has

no coherence or connection with the rest of the "Heldenbuch," and is simply a new tale, which, by way of episode, Heinrich von Ofterdingen, as we learn from his own words, had subsequently appended thereto. He says :

Heinrich von Ofterdingen
This story hath been singing,
To the joy of Princes bold,
They gave him silver and gold,
Moreover pennies and garments rich :
Here endeth this Book the which
Doth sing our noble Heroes' story :
God help us all to heavenly glory.

Such is some outline of the famous "Heldenbuch," on which it is not our business here to add any criticism. The fact that it has so long been popular betokens a certain worth in it, the kind and degree of which is also in some measure apparent. In poetry "the rude man," it has been said,

“requires only to see something going on ; the man of more refinement wishes to feel ; the truly refined man must be made to reflect.” For the first of these classes our “Hero-book,” as has been apparent enough, provides in abundance ; for the other two scantily,—indeed for the second not at all. Nevertheless our estimate of this work, which, as a series of Antique Traditions, may have considerable meaning, is apt rather to be too low. Let us remember that this is not the original “Heldenbuch” which we now see, but only a version of it into the Knight-errant dialect of the thirteenth, indeed partly of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with all the fantastic monstrosities, now so trivial, pertaining to that style ; under which disguises the really antique earnest groundwork, interesting as old Thought if not as old

Poetry, is all but quite obscured from us. But Antiquarian diligence is now busy with the "Heldenbuch" also, from which what light is in it will doubtless be elicited, and here and there a deformity removed. Though the Ethiop cannot change his skin, there is no need that even he should go abroad unwashed.*

Casper von Roen, or whoever was the ultimate redactor of the "Heldenbuch," whom Lessing designates as "a highly ill-informed man," would have done better had he quite omitted

* Our inconsiderable knowledge of the "Heldenbuch" is derived from various secondary sources, chiefly from Lessing's "Werke" (b. xiii.), where the reader will find an epitome of the whole Poem, with Extracts by Herr Fülleborn, from which the above are taken. A still more accessible and larger Abstract, with long specimens translated into verse, stands in the "Illustrations of Northern Antiquities" (pp. 45-167). Von der Hagen has since been employed specially on the "Heldenbuch," with what result we have not yet learned.

that little King Laurin, "and his little Rose-garden," which properly is no Rose-garden at all; and instead thereof introduced the "Gehörnte Siegfried" (Behorned Siegfried), whose history lies at the heart of the whole Northern Traditions; and, under a rude prose dress, is to this day a real child's-book and people's-book among the Germans. Of this Siegfried we have already seen somewhat in the Rose-garden at Worms; and shall ere-long see much more elsewhere; for he is the chief hero of the "Nibelungen": indeed nowhere can we dip into those old Fictions, whether in Scandinavia or the Rhine-land, but under one figure or another, whether as Dragon-killer and Prince-royal, or as Blacksmith and Horse-subduer, as Sigurd, Sivrit, Siegfried, we are sure to light on him. As his early adventures belong to the

strange sort, and will afterwards concern us not a little, we shall here endeavor to piece together some consistent outline of them ; so far, indeed, as that may be possible ; for his biographers, agreeing in the main points, differ widely in the details.

First, then, let no one from the title “Gehörnte” (Horned, Behorned), fancy that our brave Siegfried, who was the loveliest as well as the bravest of men, was actually cornuted, and had horns on his brow, though like Michael Angelo’s Moses ; or even that his skin, to which the epithet *Behorned* refers, was hard like a crocodile’s, and not softer than the softest shamoy ; for the truth is, his Hornedness means only an Invulnerability, like that of Achilles ; which he came by in the following manner : All men agree that Siegfried was a king’s son ; he was

born, as we here have good reason to know, "at Santen in Netherland," of Siegemund and the fair Siegelinde; yet by some family misfortune or discord, of which the accounts are very various, he came into singular straits during boyhood; having passed that happy period of life, not under the canopies of costly state, but by the sooty stithy, in one Mimer a Blacksmith's shop. Here, however, he was nowise in his proper element; ever quarrelling with his fellow-apprentices; nay, as some say, breaking the hardest anvils into shivers by his too stout hammering. So that Mimer, otherwise a first-rate Smith, could by no means do with him there. He sends him, accordingly, to the neighboring forest to fetch charcoal; well aware that a monstrous Dragon, one Regin, the Smith's own Brother, would meet

him and devour him. But far otherwise it proved. Siegfried by main force slew this Dragon, or rather Dragonized Smith's-Brother; made broth of him; and, warned by some significant phenomena, bathed therein; or, as others assert, bathed directly in the monster's blood, without cookery; and hereby attained that Invulnerability, complete in all respects, save that between his shoulders, where a lime-tree leaf chanced to settle and stick during the process, there was one little spot, a fatal spot as afterwards turned out, left in its natural state.

Siegfried, now seeing through the craft of the Smith, returned home and slew him; then set forth in search of adventures, the bare catalogue of which were long to recite. We mention only two, as subsequently of moment both for him and for us. He is by some

said to have courted, and then jilted, the fair and proud Queen Brunhild of Isenland ; nay, to have thrown down the seven gates of her Castle ; and then ridden off with her wild horse Gana, having mounted him in the meadow, and instantly broken him. Some cross passages between him and Queen Brunhild, who understood no jesting, there must clearly have been, so angry is her recognition of him in the “ Nibelungen ” ; nay, she bears a lasting grudge against him there ; as he, and indeed she also, one day too sorely felt.

His other grand adventure is with the two sons of the deceased King Nibelung, in Nibelungen-land. These two youths, to whom their father had bequeathed a Hoard or Treasure, beyond all price or computation, Siegfried, “ riding by alone,” found on the

side of a mountain, in a state of great perplexity. They had brought out the Treasure from the cave where it usually lay ; but how to part it was the difficulty ; for, not to speak of gold, there were as many jewels alone “ as twelve wagons in four days and nights, each going three journeys, could carry away ” ; nay, “ however much you took from it, there was no diminution ” : besides, in real property, a Sword, Balmung, of great potency ; a Divining-rod, “ which gave power over every one ” ; and a *Tarnkappe* (or Cloak of Darkness), which not only rendered the wearer invisible, but also gave him twelve men’s strength. So that the two Princes Royal, without counsel save from their Twelve stupid Giants, knew not how to fall upon any amicable arrangement ; and, seeing Siegfried ride by so opportunely, re-

quested him to be arbiter ; offering also the Sword Balmung for his trouble. Siegfried, who readily undertook the impossible problem, did his best to accomplish it ; but, of course, without effect ; nay, the two Nibelungen Princes, being of choleric temper, grew impatient, and provoked him ; whereupon with the Sword Balmung he slew them both, and their Twelve Giants (perhaps originally Signs of the Zodiac) to boot. Thus did the famous *Nibelungen Hort* (Hoard), and indeed the whole Nibelungen-land, come into his possession ; wearing the Sword Balmung, and having slain the two Princes and their Champions, what was there further to oppose him ? Vainly did the Dwarf Alberich, our old friend Elberich of the "Heldenbuch," who had now become special keeper of this Hoard, attempt some resistance with a

Dwarf Army ; he was driven back into the cave ; plundered of his *Tarnkappe* ; and obliged, with all his myrmidons, to swear fealty to the conqueror, whom indeed thenceforth he and they punctually obeyed.

Whereby Siegfried might now further style himself King of the Nibelungen ; master of the infinite Nibelungen Hoard (collected doubtless by art-magic in the beginning of Time, in the deep bowels of the Universe), with the *Wünschelruthe* (Wishing or Divining-rod) pertaining thereto ; owner of the *Tarnkappe*, which he ever after kept by him, to put on at will ; and though last not least, Bearer and Wielder of the Sword Balmung,* by

* By this Sword Balmung also hangs a tale. Doubtless it was one of those invaluable weapons sometimes fabricated by the old Northern Smiths, compared with which our modern Foxes and Ferraras and Toledos are mere leaden tools. Von der Hagen

the keen edge of which all this gain had come to him. To which last acquisitions adding his previously acquired Invulnerability, and his natural dignities as Prince of Netherland, he might well show himself before the foremost at Worms or elsewhere, and attempt any the highest adventure that fortune could cut out for him.

seems to think it simply the Sword Mimung under another name; in which case Siegfried's old master, Mimer, had been the maker of it, and called it after himself, as if it had been his son. In Scandinavian chronicles, veridical or not, we have the following account of that transaction. Mimer (or, as some have it, surely without ground, one Velint, once an apprentice of his) was challenged by another Craftsman, named Amilias, who boasted that he had made a suit of armor which no stroke could dint,—to equal that feat, or own himself the second Smith then extant. This last the stout Mimer would in no case do, but proceeded to forge the Sword Mimung; with which, when it was finished, he, "in presence of the King," cut asunder "a thread of wool floating on water." This would have seemed a fair fire-edge to most smiths: not so to Mimer; he sawed the blade in pieces, welded it in "a red-hot fire for three days,"

However, his subsequent history belongs all to the "Nibelungen Song"; at which fair garden of poesy we are now, through all these shaggy wildernesses and enchanted woods, finally arrived.

Apart from its antiquarian value, and not only as by far the finest monument of old German art, but intrinsi-

tempered it "with milk and oatmeal," and by much other cunning brought out a sword that severed "a ball of wool floating on water." But neither would this suffice him; he returned to his smithy, and, by means known only to himself, produced, in the course of seven weeks, a third and final edition of Mimung, which split asunder a whole floating pack of wool. The comparative trial now took place forthwith. Amilias, cased in his impenetrable coat of mail, sat down on a bench, in presence of assembled thousands, and bade Mimer strike him. Mimer fetched of course his best blow, on which Amilias observed, that there was a strange feeling of cold iron in his inwards. "Shake thyself," said Mimer; the luckless wight did so, and fell in two halves, being cleft sheer through from collar to haunch, never more to swing hammer in this world. See "Illustrations of Northern Antiquities," p. 31.

cally, and as a mere detached composition, this "Nibelungen" has an excellence that cannot but surprise us. With little preparation, any reader of poetry, even in these days, might find it interesting. It is not without a certain Unity of interest and purport, an internal coherence and completeness; it is a Whole, and some spirit of Music informs it: these are the highest characteristics of a true Poem. Considering further what intellectual environment we now find it in, it is doubly to be prized and wondered at; for it differs from those "Hero-books," as molten or carved metal does from rude agglomerated ore; almost as some Shakespeare from his fellow Dramatists, whose "Tamburlaines" and "Island Princesses," themselves not destitute of merit, first show us clearly in what pure loftiness and loneliness

the "Hamlets" and "Tempests" reign.

The unknown Singer of the "Nibelungen," though no Shakespeare, must have had a deep poetic soul; wherein things discontinuous and inanimate shaped themselves together into life, and the Universe with its wondrous purport stood significantly imaged; overarching, as with heavenly firmaments and eternal harmonies, the little scene where men strut and fret their hour. His Poem, unlike so many old and new pretenders to that name, has a basis and organic structure, a beginning, middle, and end; there is one great principle and idea set forth in it, round which all its multifarious parts combine in living union. Remarkable it is, moreover, how along with this essence and primary condition of all poetic virtue, the minor

external virtues of what we call Taste and so forth, are, as it were, presupposed ; and the living soul of Poetry being there, its body of incidents, its garment of language, come of their own accord. So too in the case of Shakespeare : his feeling of propriety, as compared with that of the Marlowes and Fletchers, his quick sure sense of what is fit and unfit, either in act or word, might astonish us, had he no other superiority. But true Inspiration, as it may well do, includes that same Taste, or rather a far higher and heartfelt Taste, of which that other "elegant" species is but an ineffectual, irrational apéry. Let us see the herald Mercury actually descend from his Heaven, and the bright wings, and the graceful movement of these, will not be wanting.

With an instinctive art, far different

from acquired artifice, this Poet of the "Nibelungen," working in the same province with his contemporaries of the "Heldenbuch," on the same material of tradition, has, in a wonderful degree, possessed himself of what these could only strive after; and, with his "clear feeling of fictitious truth," avoided as false the errors and monstrous perplexities in which they vainly struggled. He is of another species than they; in language, in purity and depth of feeling, in fineness of invention, stands quite apart from them.

The language of the "Heldenbuch," as we saw above, was a feeble half-articulate child's-speech, the metre nothing better than a miserable doggerel; whereas here in the old Frankish (*Oberdeutsch*) dialect of the "Nibelungen," we have a clear, decisive

utterance, and in a real system of verse, not without essential regularity, great liveliness, and now and then even harmony of rhythm. Doubtless we must often call it a diffuse, diluted utterance ; at the same time it is genuine, with a certain antique, garrulous heartiness, and has a rhythm in the thoughts as well as the words. The simplicity is never silly : even in that perpetual recurrence of epithets, sometimes of rhymes, as where two words, for instance *lip* (body, life, *leib*) and *wip* (woman, wife, *weib*) are indissolubly wedded together, and the one never shows itself without the other following,—there is something which reminds us not so much of poverty, as of trustfulness and childlike innocence. Indeed a strange charm lies in those old tones, where, in gay dancing melodies, the sternest tidings are sung to us ;

and deep floods of Sadness and Strife play lightly in little curling billows, like seas in summer. It is as a meek smile, in whose still, thoughtful depths a whole infinitude of patience, and love, and heroic strength lie revealed. But in other cases too, we have seen this outward sport and inward earnestness offer grateful contrast, and cunning excitement ; for example, in Tasso ; of whom, though otherwise different enough, this old Northern Singer has more than once reminded us. There too, as here, we have a dark, solemn meaning in light guise ; deeds of high temper, harsh self-denial, daring, and death stand embodied in that soft, quick-flowing, joyfully modulated verse. Nay, further, as if the implement, much more than we might fancy, had influenced the work done, these two Poems, could we trust

our individual feeling, have in one respect the same poetical result for us. In the "Nibelungen" as in the "Gerusalemme," the persons and their story are indeed brought vividly before us, yet not near and palpably present; it is rather as if we looked on that scene through an inverted telescope, whereby the whole was carried far away into the distance, the life-large figures compressed into brilliant miniatures, so clear, so real, yet tiny, elf-like and beautified as well as lessened, their colors being now closer and brighter, the shadows and trivial features no longer visible. This, as we partly apprehend, comes of *singing* Epic Poems; most part of which only pretend to be sung. Tasso's rich melody still lives among the Italian people; the "Nibelungen" also is what it professes to be, a "Song."

No less striking than the verse and language is the quality of the invention manifested here. Of the Fable, or narrative material of the "Nibelungen" we should say that it had high, almost the highest merit; so daintily yet firmly is it put together; with such felicitous selection of the beautiful, the essential, and no less felicitous rejection of whatever was unbeautiful or even extraneous. The reader is no longer afflicted with that chaotic brood of Fire-drakes, Giants, and malicious, turbaned Turks, so fatally rife in the "Heldenbuch." All this is swept away, or only hovers in faint shadows afar off, and free field is open for legitimate perennial interests. Yet neither is the "Nibelungen" without its wonders, for it is poetry and not prose; here, too, a supernatural world encompasses the natural, and, though at rare inter-

vals and in calm manner, reveals itself there. It is truly wonderful, with what skill our simple untaught Poet deals with the marvellous ; admitting it without reluctance or criticism, yet precisely in the degree and shape that will best avail him. Here, if in no other respect, we should say that he has a decided superiority to Homer himself. The whole story of the "Nibelungen" is fateful, mysterious, guided on by unseen influences ; yet the actual marvels are few, and done in the far distance. Those Dwarfs, and Cloaks of Darkness, and charmed Treasure-caves are heard of rather than beheld ; the tidings of them seem to issue from unknown space. Vain were it to inquire where that Nibelungen-land specially is : its very name is *Nebel-land* or *Nift-land*, the land of Darkness, of Invisibility. The "Nibe-

lungen-Heroes," that muster in thousands and tens of thousands, though they march to the Rhine or Danube, and we see their strong limbs and shining armor, we could almost fancy to be children of the air. Far beyond the firm horizon, that wonder-bearing region swims on the infinite waters; unseen by bodily eye, or at most discerned as a faint streak, hanging in the blue depths, uncertain whether island or cloud. And thus the "Nibelungen Song," though based on the bottomless foundations of Spirit, and not unvisited of skyey messengers, is a real, rounded, habitable Earth, where we find firm footing, and the wondrous and the common live amicably together. Perhaps it would be difficult to find any Poet of ancient or modern times, who in this trying problem has steered his way with greater delicacy and success.

To any of our readers who may have personally studied the "Nibelungen," these high praises of ours will not seem exaggerated: the rest, who are the vast majority, must endeavor to accept them with some degree of faith, at least of curiosity; to vindicate, and judicially substantiate them would far exceed our present opportunities. Nay, in any case, the criticisms, the alleged Characteristics of a Poem are so many Theorems, which are indeed enunciated, truly or falsely, but the Demonstration of which must be sought for in the reader's own study and experience. Nearly all that can be attempted here is some hasty epitome of the mere Narrative; no substantial image of the work, but a feeble outline and shadow. To which task, as the personages and their environment have already been in some

degree illustrated, we can now proceed without obstacle.

The “ Nibelungen ” has been called the Northern Epos ; yet it has, in great part, a Dramatic character : those thirty-nine *Aventiuren* (Adventures), which it consists of, might be so many scenes in a Tragedy. The catastrophe is dimly prophesied from the beginning ; and, at every fresh step, rises more and more clearly into view. A shadow of coming Fate, as it were, a low inarticulate voice of Doom falls, from the first, out of that charmed Nibelungen-land : the discord of two women is as a little spark of evil passion, which ere long enlarges itself into a crime ; foul murder is done ; and now the Sin rolls on like a devouring fire, till the guilty and the innocent are alike encircled with it, and

a whole land is ashes, and a whole race is swept away.

*Uns ist in alten mæren Wunders vil geseit,
Von helden lobebæren Von grozer chuon-
heit ;*

*Von vrouden und' hoch-geziten, Von wei-
nen und von chlagen,
Von chuner rechen striten, Muget ir nu
wunder hören sagen.*

We find in ancient story Wonders many
told,
Of heroes in great glory With spirit free
and bold ;
Of joyances and high-tides, Of weeping and
of woe,
Of noble Recken striving, Mote ye now
wonders know.

This is the brief artless Proem ; and the promise contained in it proceeds directly towards fulfilment. In the very second stanza we learn :

*Es wühs in Burgonden Ein vil edel mage-
din,
Das in allen landen Niht schoners mohte
sin ;
Chriemhilt was si geheien, Si wart ein
schone wip ;
Darumbe müsen degene Vil verliesen den
lip.*

A right noble maiden Did grow in Bur-
gundy,
That in all lands of earth Nought fairer
mote there be ;
Chriemhild of Worms she hight, She was a
fairest wife ;
For the which must warriors A many lose
their life.*

* This is the first of a thousand instances in which the two inseparables, *wip* and *lip*, or in modern tongue *weib* and *leib*, as mentioned above, appear together. From these two opening stanzas of the "Nibelungen Lied," in its purest form, the reader may obtain some idea of the versification. It runs on in more or less regular Alexandrines, with a cæsural pause in each, where the capital letter occurs ; indeed, the lines seem originally to have been divided into two at that point, for sometimes, as in Stanza

Chriemhild, this world's-wonder, a king's daughter and king's sister, and no less coy and proud than fair, dreams one night that "she had petted a falcon, strong, beautiful, and wild; which two eagles snatched away from her: this she was forced to see; greater sorrow felt she never in the world." Her mother, Ute, to whom she relates the vision, soon redes it for her; the falcon is a noble husband, whom, God keep him, she must suddenly lose. Chriemhild declares warmly for the single state; as, indeed, living there at the Court of Worms, with her brothers, Gunther, Gernot, Geiselher, "three

First, the middle words (*mæren*, *lobebæren*; *geziten*, *striten*) also rhyme; but this is rather a rare case. The word *rechen* or *recken*, used in the First Stanza, is the constant designation for bold fighters, and has the same root with *rich* (thus in old French, *hommes riches*; in Spanish, *ricos hombres*), which last is here also synonymous with *powerful*, and is applied to kings, and even to the Almighty, *Got dem richen*.

kings noble and rich," in such pomp and renown, the pride of Burgundenland and Earth, she might readily enough have changed for the worse. However, dame Ute bids her not to be too emphatical ; for "if ever she have heartfelt joy in life, it will be from man's love, and she shall be a fair wife (*wip*), when God sends her a right worthy Ritter's *lip*." Chriemhild is more in earnest than maidens usually are when they talk thus ; it appears she guarded against love, "for many a lief-long day" ; nevertheless, she too must yield to destiny. "Honourably she was to become a most noble Ritter's wife." "This," adds the old Singer, "was that same falcon she dreamed of : how sorely she since revenged him on her nearest kindred ! For that one death died full many a mother's son."

It may be observed, that the Poet here, and at all times, shows a marked partiality for Chriemhild ; ever striving, unlike his fellow-singers, to magnify her worth, her faithfulness, and loveliness ; and softening, as much as may be, whatever makes against her. No less a favorite with him is Siegfried, the prompt, gay, peaceably fearless hero ; to whom, in the Second *Aventiure*, we are here suddenly introduced, at Santen (Xanten), the Court of Netherland ; whither, to his glad parents, after achievements (to us partially known) “ of which one might sing and tell forever,” that noble prince has returned. Much as he has done and conquered, he is but just arrived at man’s years ; it is on occasion of this joyful event that a high-tide (*hochgezit*) is now held there, with infinite joustings, minstrelsy, largesses,

and other chivalrous doings, all which is sung with utmost heartiness. The old King Siegemund offers to resign his crown to him ; but Siegfried has other game a-field : the unparalleled beauty of Chriemhild has reached his ear and his fancy ; and now he will to Worms and woo her, at least “see how it stands with her.” Fruitless is it for Siegemund and the mother Siegelinde to represent the perils of that enterprise, the pride of those Burgundian Gunthers and Gernots, the fierce temper of their uncle Hagen ; Siegfried is as obstinate as young men are in these cases, and can hear no counsel. Nay, he will not accept the much more liberal proposition, to take an army with him, and conquer the country, if it must be so ; he will ride forth, like himself, with twelve champions only, and so defy the future. Whereupon,

the old people finding that there is no other course, proceed to make him clothes* ;—at least, the good queen with “her fair women sitting night and day,” and sewing, does so, the father furnishing noblest battle and riding gear ;—and so dismiss him with many blessings and lamentations. “For him wept sore the king and his *wife*, but he comforted both their bodies (*lip*) ; he said : ‘Ye must not weep, for my body ever shall ye be without care.’”

Sad was it to the Recken, Stood weeping
 many a maid ;
I ween their heart had them The tidings
 true foresaid,
That of their friends so many Death thereby
 should find ;
Cause had they of lamenting. Such boding
 in their mind.

* This is a never-failing preparative for all expeditions, and always specified and insisted on with a simple, loving, almost female impressiveness.

Nevertheless, on the seventh morning, that adventurous company "ride up the sand," on the Rhine-beach, to Worms, in high temper, in dress and trappings, aspect and bearing more than kingly.

Siegfried's reception at King Gunther's court, and his brave sayings and doings there for some time, we must omit. One fine trait of his chivalrous delicacy it is that, for a whole year, he never hints at his errand; never once sees or speaks of Chriemhild, whom, nevertheless, he is longing day and night to meet. She, on her side, has often through her lattices noticed the gallant stranger, victorious in all tiltings and knightly exercises; whereby it would seem, in spite of her rigorous predeterminations, some kindness for him is already gliding in. Meanwhile, mighty wars and threats of invasion

arise, and Siegfried does the state good service. Returning victorious, both as general and soldier, from Hessen (Hessia), where, by help of his own courage and the sword Balmung, he has captured a Danish king, and utterly discomfited a Saxon one; he can now show himself before Chriemhild without other blushes than those of timid love. Nay, the maiden has herself inquired pointedly of the messengers, touching his exploits; and "her fair face grew rose-red when she heard them." A gay High-tide, by way of triumph, is appointed; several kings, and two-and-thirty princes, and knights enough with "gold-red saddles," come to joust; and better than whole infinities of kings and princes with their saddles, the fair Chriemhild herself, under guidance of her mother, chiefly too in honor of the victor, is to

grace that sport. "Ute the full rich" fails not to set her needle-women to work, and "clothes of price are taken from their presses," for the love of her child, "wherewith to deck many women and maids." And now, "on the Whitsun-morning," all is ready, and glorious as heart could desire it; brave Ritters, "five thousand or more," all glancing in the lists; but grander still, Chriemhild herself is advancing beside her mother, with a hundred body-guards, all sword in hand, and many a noble maid "wearing rich raiment," In her train!

"Now issued forth the lovely one (*minnechliche*), as the red morning doth from troubled clouds; much care fled away from him who bore her in his heart, and long had done; he saw the lovely one stand in her beauty.

“There glanced from her garments full many precious stones, her rose-red color shone full lovely: try what he might, each man must confess that in this world he had not seen aught so fair.

“Like as the light moon stands before the stars, and its sheen so clear goes over the clouds, even so stood she now before many fair women; whereat cheered was the mind of the hero.

“The rich chamberlains you saw go before her, the high-spirited Recken would not forbear, but pressed on where they saw the lovely maiden. Siegfried the lord was both glad and sad.

“He thought in his mind, How could this be that I should woo thee? That was a foolish dream; yet must I forever be a stranger, I were rather (*sanfter*, softer) dead. He became, from these thoughts, in quick changes, pale and red.

“Thus stood so lovely the child of Siegelinde, as if he were limned on parchment by a master’s art; for all granted that hero so beautiful they had never seen.”

In this passage, which we have rendered from the Fifth *Aventiure* into the closest prose, it is to be remarked, among other singularities, that there are two similes : in which figure of speech our old Singer deals very sparingly. The first, that comparison of Chriemhild to the moon among stars with its sheen going over the clouds, has now for many centuries had little novelty or merit : but the second, that of Siegfried to a Figure in some illuminated Manuscript, is graceful in itself ; and unspeakably so to antiquaries, seldom honored, in their Black-letter stubbing and grubbing, with such a poetic wind-fall !

A prince and a princess of this quality are clearly made for one another. Nay, on the motion of young Herr Gernot, fair Chriemhild is bid specially to salute Siegfried, she who

had never saluted man ; which unparalleled grace the lovely one, in all courtliness, openly does him. “ Be welcome,” said she, “ Herr Siegfried, a noble Ritter good ” ; from which salute, for this seems to have been all, “ much raised was his mind.” He bowed with graceful reverence, as his manner was with women ; she took him by the hand, and with fond stolen glances they looked at each other. Whether in that ceremonial joining of hands there might not be some soft, slight pressure, of far deeper import, is what our Singer will not take upon him to say ; however, he thinks the affirmative more probable. Henceforth, in that bright May weather, the two were seen constantly together,—nothing but felicity around and before them. In these days, truly, it must have been that the famous Prize-fight,

with Dietrich of Bern and his Eleven Lombardy champions, took place, little to the profit of the two Lovers ; were it not rather that the whole of that Rose-garden transaction, as given in the " Heldenbuch," might be falsified and even imaginary ; for no mention or hint of it occurs here. War or battle is not heard of ; Siegfried the peerless walks wooingly by the side of Chriemhild the peerless ; matters, it is evident, are in the best possible course.

But now comes a new side-wind, which, however, in the long-run also forwards the voyage. Tidings, namely, reached over the Rhine, not so surprising we might hope, " that there was many a fair maiden " ; whereupon Gunther the King " thought with himself to win one of them." It was an honest purpose in King Gunther, only his choice was not the discreetest.

For no fair maiden will content him but Queen Brunhild, a lady who rules in *Isenland*, far over sea, famed indeed for her beauty, yet no less so for her caprices. Fables we have met with of this Brunhild being properly a *Valkyr*, or Scandinavian Houri, such as were wont to lead old northern warriors from their last battle-field into Valhalla ; and that her castle of *Isenstein* stood amidst a lake of fire. But this, as we said, is fable and groundless calumny, of which there is not so much as notice taken here. Brunhild, it is plain enough, was a flesh-and-blood maiden, glorious in look and faculty, only with some preternatural talents given her, and the strangest wayward habits. It appears, for example, that any suitor proposing for her has this brief condition to proceed upon : he must try the adorable in the three sev-

eral games of hurling the Spear (at one another), Leaping, and throwing the Stone. If victorious, he gains her hand ; if vanquished, he loses his own head ; which latter issue, such is the fair Amazon's strength, frequent fatal experiment has shown to be the only probable one.

Siegfried, who knows something of Brunhild and her ways, votes clearly against the whole enterprise ; however, Gunther has once for all got the whim in him, and must see it out. The prudent Hagen von Troneg, uncle to love-sick Gunther, and ever true to him, then advises that Siegfried be requested to take part in the adventure ; to which request Siegfried readily accedes on one condition : that, should they prove fortunate, he himself is to have Chriemhild to wife when they return. This readily settled, he now

takes charge of the business and throws a little light on it for the others. They must lead no army thither ; only two, Hagen and Dankwart, besides the king and himself, shall go. The grand subject of *waeie** (clothes) is next hinted at, and in general terms elucidated ; whereupon a solemn consultation with Chriemhild ensues ; and a great cutting-out, on her part, of white silk from Araby, of green silk from Zazemang, of strange fish-skins covered with morocco silk ; a great sewing thereof for seven weeks, on the part of her maids ; lastly, a fitting-on of the three suits by each hero, for each had three ; and heartiest thanks in return, seeing all fitted perfectly, and was of grace and price unutterable. What is still more to the point,

* Hence our English *weeds*, and Scotch *wad* (pledge) ; and, say the etymologists, *wadding*, and even *wedding*.

Siegfried takes his Cloak of Darkness with him, fancying he may need it there. The good old Singer, who has hitherto alluded only in the faintest way to Siegfried's prior adventures and miraculous possessions, introduces this of the *Tarnkappe* with great frankness and simplicity. "Of wild dwarfs (*getwergen*)," says he, "I have heard tell, they are in hollow mountains, and for defence wear somewhat called *Tarnkappe*, of wondrous sort"; the qualities of which garment, that it renders invisible, and gives twelve men's strength, are already known to us.

The voyage to Isenstein, Siegfried steering the ship thither, is happily accomplished in twenty days. Gunther admires to a high degree the fine masonry of the place; as indeed he well might, there being some eighty-

six towers, three immense palaces and one immense hall, the whole built of "marble green as grass"; further he sees many fair women looking from the windows down on the bark, and thinks the loveliest is she in the snow-white dress; which, Siegfried informs him, is a worthy choice; the snow-white maiden being no other than Brunhild. It is also to be kept in mind that Siegfried, for reasons best known to himself, had previously stipulated that, though a free king, they should all treat him as vassal of Gunther, for whom accordingly he holds the stirrup, as they mount on the beach; thereby giving rise to a misconception, which in the end led to saddest consequences.

Queen Brunhild, who had called back her maidens from the windows, being a strict disciplinarian, and re-

tired into the interior of her green-marble Isenstein, to dress still better, now inquires of some attendant, Who these strangers of such lordly aspect are, and what brings them? The attendant professes himself at a loss to say ; one of them looks like Siegfried, the other is evidently by his port a noble king. His notice of Von Troneg Hagen is peculiarly vivid :

The third of those companions He is of aspect stern,
And yet with lovely body, Rich queen, as ye might discern ;
From those *his rapid glances*, For the eyes nought rest in him,
Meseems this foreign Recke Is of temper fierce and grim.

This is one of those little graphic touches, scattered all over our Poem, which do more for picturing out an object, especially a man, than whole

pages of enumeration and mensuration. Never after do we hear of this stout, indomitable Hagen, in all the wild deeds and sufferings he passes through, but those *swinden blicken* of his come before us, with the restless, deep, dauntless spirit that looks through them.

Brunhild's reception of Siegfried is not without tartness ; which, however, he, with polished courtesy and the nimblest address, ever at his command, softens down, or hurries over. He is here, without will of his own, and so forth, only as attendant on his master, the renowned King Gunther, who comes to sue for her hand, as the summit and keystone of all earthly blessings. Brunhild, who had determined on fighting Siegfried himself, if so he willed it, makes small account of this King Gunther or his prowess ;

and instantly clears the ground, and equips her for battle. The royal wooer must have looked a little blank when he saw a shield brought in for his fair one's handling, "three spans thick with gold and iron," which four chamberlains could hardly bear, and a spear or javelin she meant to shoot or hurl, which was a burden for three. Hagen, in angry apprehension for his king and nephew, exclaims that they shall all lose their life (*lip*), and that she is the *tiuvels wip*, or Devil's wife. Nevertheless Siegfried is already there in his Cloak of Darkness, twelve men strong, and privily whispers in the ear of royalty to be of comfort; takes the shield to himself, Gunther only affecting to hold it, and so fronts the edge of battle. Brunhild performs prodigies of spear-hurling, of leaping, and stone-pitching; but Gunther, or rather Sieg-

fried,—“ who does the work, he only acting the gestures,” nay, who even snatches him up into the air, and leaps carrying him,—gains a decided victory, and the lovely Amazon must own with surprise and shame that she is fairly won. Siegfried presently appears without *Tarnkappe*, and asks with a grave face, When the games, then, are to begin?

So far well; yet somewhat still remains to be done. Brunhild will not sail for Worms, to be wedded, till she have assembled a fit train of warriors; wherein the Burgundians, being here without retinue, see symptoms or possibilities of mischief. The deft Siegfried, ablest of men, again knows a resource. In his *Tarnkappe* he steps on board the bark, which, seen from the shore, appears to drift off of its own accord; and therein, stoutly steering

towards *Nibelungen-land*, he reaches that mysterious country and the mountain where his Hoard lies, before the second morning ; finds Dwarf Alberich and all his giant sentinels at their post, and faithful almost to the death ; these soon rouse him thirty thousand Nibelungen Recken, from whom he has only to choose one thousand of the best ; equip them splendidly enough ; and therewith return to Gunther, simply as if they were that sovereign's own bodyguard, that had been delayed a little by stress of weather.

The final arrival at Worms ; the bridal feasts, for there are two, Siegfried also receiving his reward ; and the joyance and splendor of man and maid, at this lordliest of high-tides ; and the joustings, greater than those at Aspramont or Montauban,—every reader can fancy for himself. Remark-

able only is the evil eye with which Queen Brunhild still continues to regard the noble Siegfried. She cannot understand how Gunther, the Landlord of the Rhine,* should have bestowed his sister on a vassal. The assurance that Siegfried also is a prince and heir-apparent, the prince namely of Netherland, and little inferior to Burgundian majesty itself, yields no complete satisfaction; and Brunhild hints plainly that, unless the truth be told her, unpleasant consequences may follow. Thus is there ever a ravelled thread in the web of life! But for this little cloud of spleen, these bridal feasts had been all bright and balmy as the month of June. Unluckily, too,

* *Der Wirt von Rine*: singular enough, the word *Wirth*, often applied to royalty in that old dialect, is now also the title of innkeepers. To such base uses may we come.

the cloud is an electric one ; spreads itself in time into a general earthquake ; nay, that very night, becomes a thunder-storm, or tornado, unparalleled we may hope in the annals of connubial happiness.

The Singer of the “ Nibelungen,” unlike the author of “ Roderick Random,” cares little for intermeddling with “ the chaste mysteries of Hymen.” Could we, in the corrupt ambiguous modern tongue, hope to exhibit any shadow of the old simple, true-hearted, merely historical spirit, with which, in perfect purity of soul, he describes things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme,—we could a tale unfold ! Suffice it to say, King Gunther, Landlord of the Rhine, falling sheer down from the third heaven of hope, finds his spouse the most athletic and intractable of women ; and him-

self, at the close of the adventure, nowise encircled in her arms, but tied hard and fast, hand and foot, in her girdle, and hung thereby, at considerable elevation, on a nail in the wall. Let any reader of sensibility figure the emotions of the royal breast, there as he vibrates suspended on his peg, and his inexorable bride sleeping sound in her bed below ! Towards morning he capitulates ; engaging to observe the prescribed line of conduct with utmost strictness, so he may but avoid becoming a laughing-stock to all men.

No wonder the dread king looked rather grave next morning, and received the congratulations of mankind in a cold manner. He confesses to Siegfried, who partly suspects how it may be, that he has brought the “ evil devil ” home to his house in the shape of wife, whereby he is wretched

enough. However, there are remedies for all things but death. The ever-serviceable Siegfried undertakes even here to make the crooked straight. What may not an honest friend with Tarnkappe and twelve men's strength perform? Proud Brunhild, next night, after a fierce contest, owns herself again vanquished; Gunther is there to reap the fruits of another's victory; the noble Siegfried withdraws, taking nothing with him but the luxury of doing good, and the proud queen's Ring and Girdle gained from her in that struggle; which small trophies he, with the last infirmity of a noble mind, presents to his own fond wife, little dreaming that they would one day cost him and her, and all of them, so dear. Such readers as take any interest in poor Gunther will be gratified to learn, that from this hour Brunhild's

preternatural faculties quite left her, being all dependent on her maidhood ; so that any more spear-hurling, or other the like extraordinary work, is not to be apprehended from her.

If we add, that Siegfried formally made over to his dear Chriemhild the Nibelungen Hoard, by way of *Morgengabe* (or, as we may say, Jointure) ; and the high-tide, though not the honeymoon, being past, returned to Netherland with his spouse, to be welcomed there with infinite rejoicings,—we have gone through as it were the First Act of this Tragedy ; and may here pause to look round us for a moment. The main characters are now introduced on the scene, the relations that bind them together are dimly sketched out : there is the prompt, cheerfully heroic, invulnerable, and invincible Siegfried, now happiest of

men ; the high Chriemhild, fitly mated, and if a moon, revolving glorious round her sun, or *Friedel* (joy and darling) ; not without pride and female aspirings, yet not prouder than one so gifted and placed is pardonable for being. On the other hand, we have King Gunther, or rather let us say king's-mantle Gunther, for never except in that one enterprise of courting Brunhild, in which too, without help, he would have cut so poor a figure, does the worthy sovereign show will of his own, or character other than that of good potter's clay ; further, the suspicious, forecasting, yet stout and reckless Hagen, him with the *rapid glances*, and these turned not too kindly on Siegfried, whose prowess he has used yet dreads, whose Nibelungen Hoard he perhaps already covets ; lastly the rigorous and vigorous Brun-

hild, of whom also more is to be feared than hoped. Considering the fierce nature of these now mingled ingredients ; and how, except perhaps in the case of Gunther, there is no menstruum of placid stupidity to soften them ; except in Siegfried, no element of heroic truth to master them and bind them together,—unquiet fermentation may readily be apprehended.

Meanwhile, for a season all is peace and sunshine. Siegfried reigns in Netherland, of which his father has surrendered him the crown ; Chriemhild brings him a son, whom in honor of the uncle he christens Gunther, which courtesy the uncle and Brunhild repay in kind. The Nibelungen Hoard is still open and inexhaustible ; Dwarf Alberich and all the Recken there still loyal ; outward relations friendly, internal supremely prosperous : these are

halcyon days. But, alas, they cannot last. Queen Brunhild, retaining with true female tenacity her first notion, right or wrong, reflects one day that Siegfried, who is and shall be nothing but her husband's vassal, has for a long while paid him no service; and, determined on a remedy, manages that Siegfried and his queen shall be invited to a high-tide at Worms, where opportunity may chance for enforcing that claim. Thither accordingly, after ten years' absence, we find these illustrious guests returning; Siegfried escorted by a thousand Nibelungen Ritters, and, further, by his father Siegemund, who leads a train of Netherlanders. Here for eleven days, amid infinite joustings, there is a true heaven-on-earth; but the apple of discord is already lying in the knightly ring, and two Women, the proudest

and keenest-tempered of the world, simultaneously stoop to lift it. *Aventure* Fourteenth is entitled "How the two queens rated one another." Never was courtlier Billingsgate uttered, or which came more directly home to the business and bosoms of women. The subject is that old story of Precedence, which indeed, from the time of Cain and Abel downwards, has wrought such effusion of blood and bile both among men and women; lying at the bottom of all armaments and battle-fields, whether Blenheims and Waterloos, or only plate-displays, and tongue-and-eye skirmishes, in the circle of domestic Tea: nay, the very animals have it; and horses, were they but the miserablest Shelties and Welsh ponies, will not graze together till it has been ascertained, by clear fight, who is master of whom, and a

proper drawing-room etiquette established.

Brunhild and Chriemhild take to arguing about the merits of their husbands : the latter, fondly expatiating on the pre-eminence of her *Friedel*, how he walks “ like the moon among stars ” before all other men, is reminded by her sister that one man at least must be excepted, the mighty King Gunther of Worms, to whom, by his own confession long ago at Isenstein, he is vassal and servant. Chriemhild will sooner admit that clay is above sunbeams, than any such proposition ; which therefore she, in all politeness requests of her sister never more to touch upon while she lives. The result may be foreseen : rejoinder follows reply, statement grows assertion ; flint-sparks have fallen on the dry flax, which from smoke bursts into conflagration.

gration. The two queens part in hottest, though still clear-flaming anger. Not, however, to let their anger burn out, but only to feed it with more solid fuel. Chriemhild dresses her forty maids in finer than royal apparel ; orders out all her husband's Recken ; and so attended, walks foremost to the Minster, where mass is to be said ; thus practically asserting that she is not only a true queen, but the worthier of the two. Brunhild, quite outdone in splendor, and enraged beyond all patience, overtakes her at the door of the Minster, with peremptory order to stop : " Before king's wife shall vassal's never go."

Then said the fair Chriemhilde, Right angry was her mood :

" Couldst thou but hold thy peace, It were surely for thy good ;

Thyself hast all polluted With shame thy
fair bodye ;
How can a Concubine By right a King's
wife be ? ”

“ Whom hast thou Concubined ? ” The
King's wife quickly spake ;
“ That do I thee,” said Chriemhild ; “ For
thy pride and vaunting's sake ;
Who first had thy fair body Was Siegfried
my beloved Man ;
My Brother it was not That thy maidhood
from thee wan.”

In proof of which outrageous saying,
she produces that Ring and Girdle ;
the innocent conquest of which, as we
well know, had a far other origin.
Brunhild burst into tears ; “ sadder
day she never saw.” Nay, perhaps a
new light now rose on her over much
that had been dark in her late history ;
“ she rued full sore that ever she was
born.”

Here, then, is the black injury which only blood will wash away. The evil fiend has begun his work ; and the issue of it lies beyond man's control. Siegfried may protest his innocence of that calumny, and chastise his indiscreet spouse for uttering it even in the heat of anger : the female heart is wounded beyond healing ; the old springs of bitterness against this hero unite into a fell flood of hate ; while he sees the sunlight, she cannot know a joyful hour. Vengeance is soon offered her : Hagen, who lives only for his prince, undertakes this bad service ; by treacherous professions of attachment, and anxiety to guard Siegfried's life, he gains from Chriemhild the secret of his vulnerability ; Siegfried is carried out to hunt ; and in the hour of frankest gayety is stabbed through the fatal spot ; and, felling the murderer to the

ground, dies upbraiding his false kindred, yet, with a touching simplicity, recommending his child and wife to their protection. “ ‘ Let her feel that she is your sister ; was there ever virtue in princes, be true to her ; for me my Father and my men shall long wait.’ The flowers all around were wetted with blood, then he struggled with death ; not long did he this, the weapon cut him too keen ; so he could speak nought more, the Recke bold and noble.”

At this point, we might say, ends the Third Act of our Tragedy ; the whole story henceforth takes a darker character ; it is as if a tone of sorrow and fateful boding became more and more audible in its free, light music. Evil has produced new evil in fatal augmentation, injury is abolished, but in its stead there is guilt and de-

spair. Chriemhild, an hour ago so rich, is now robbed of all ; her grief is boundless as her love has been. No glad thought can ever more dwell in her ; darkness, utter night has come over her, as she looked into the red of morning. The spoiler too walks abroad unpunished ; the bleeding corpse witnesses against Hagen, nay, he himself cares not to hide the deed. But who is there to avenge the friendless ? Siegfried's Father has returned in haste to his own land ; Chriemhild is now alone on the earth, her husband's grave is all that remains to her ; there only can she sit, as if waiting at the threshold of her own dark home ; and in prayers and tears pour out the sorrow and love that have no end. Still further injuries are heaped on her : by advice of the crafty Hagen, Gunther, who had not planned the

murder, yet permitted and witnessed it, now comes with whining professions of repentance and good-will ; persuades her to send for the Nibelungen Hoard to Worms ; where no sooner is it arrived, than Hagen and the rest forcibly take it from her ; and her last trust in affection or truth from mortal is rudely cut away. Bent to the earth, she weeps only for her lost Siegfried, knows no comfort, but will weep forever.

One lurid gleam of hope, after long years of darkness, breaks in on her, in the prospect of revenge. King Etzel sends from his far country to solicit her hand : the embassy she hears at first, as a woman of ice might do ; the good Rudiger, Etzel's spokesman, pleads in vain that his king is the richest of all earthly kings ; that he is so lonely " since Frau Helke died " ; that

though a heathen, he has Christians about him, and may one day be converted ; till at length, when he hints distantly at the power of Etzel to avenge her injuries, she on a sudden becomes all attention. Hagen foreseeing such possibilities, protests against the match ; but is overruled : Chriemhild departs with Rudiger for the land of the Huns ; taking cold leave of her relations ; only two of whom, her brothers Gernot and Geiselher, innocent of that murder, does she admit near her as convoy to the Donau.

The Nibelungen Hoard has hitherto been fatal to all its possessors ; to the two sons of Nibelung ; to Siegfried its conqueror : neither does the Burgundian Royal House fare better with it. Already, discords threatening to arise, Hagen sees prudent to sink it in the Rhine ; first taking oath of Gunther

and his brothers, that none of them shall reveal the hiding-place while any of the rest is alive. But the curse that clave to it could not be sunk there. The Nibelungen-land is now theirs : they themselves are henceforth called Nibelungen ; and this history of their fate is the Nibelungen Song, or " Nibelungen Noth " (Nibelungen's Need, extreme Need, or final wreck and abolition).

The Fifth Act of our strange eventful history now draws on. Chriemhild has a kind husband, of hospitable disposition, who troubles himself little about her secret feelings and intents. With his permission, she sends two minstrels, inviting the Burgundian Court to a high-tide at Etzel's ; she has charged the messengers to say that she is happy, and to bring all Gunther's champions with them. Her

eye was on Hagen, but she could not single him from the rest. After seven days' deliberation, Gunther answers that he will come. Hagen has loudly dissuaded the journey, but again been overruled. "It is his fate," says a commentator, "like Cassandra's, ever to foresee the evil, and ever to be disregarded. He himself shut his ear against the inward voice; and now his warnings are uttered to the deaf." He argues long, but in vain; nay, young Gernot hints at last that this aversion originates in personal fear:

Then spake Von Troneg Hagen: "Nowise
is it through fear;

So you command it, Heroes, Then up, gird
on your gear;

I ride with you the foremost Into King Et-
zel's land."

Since then full many a helm Was shivered
by his hand.

Frau Ute's dreams and omens are now unavailing with him ; " whoso heedeth dreams," says Hagen, " of the right story wotteth not " : he has computed the worst issue, and defied it.

Many a little touch of pathos, and even solemn beauty lies carelessly scattered in these rhymes, had we space to exhibit such here. As specimen of a strange, winding, diffuse, yet innocently graceful style of narrative, we have translated some considerable portion of this Twenty-fifth *Aventiure*, " How the Nibelungen marched (fared) to the Huns," into verses as literal as might be ; which now, alas, look mournfully different from the original ; almost like Scriblerus' shield when the barbarian housemaid had scoured it ! Nevertheless, to do for the reader what we can, let somewhat of that modernized ware, such

as it is, be set before him. The brave Nibelungen are on the eve of departure, and about ferrying over the Rhine; and here it may be noted that Worms,* with our old Singer, lies

* This City of Worms, had we a right imagination, ought to be as venerable to us Moderns, as any Thebes or Troy was to the Ancients. Whether founded by the Gods or not, it is of quite unknown antiquity, and has witnessed the most wonderful things. Within authentic times, the Romans were here; and if tradition may be credited, Attila also; it was the seat of the Austrasian kings; the frequent residence of Charlemagne himself; innumerable Festivals, Hightides, Tournaments, and Imperial Diets were held in it, of which latter, one at least, that where Luther appeared in 1521, will be forever remembered by all mankind. Nor is Worms more famous in history than, as indeed we may see here, it is in romance; whereof many monuments and vestiges remain to *this day*. "A pleasant meadow there," says Von der Hagen, "is still called Chriemhild's *Rosengarten*. The name *Worms* itself is derived (by Legendary Etymology) from the Dragon, or *Worm*, which Siegfried slew, the figure of which once formed the City Arms; in past times, there was also to be seen here an ancient, strong *Riesen-Haus* (Giant's-house), and many a memorial of Siegfried: his Lance, 66 feet

not in its true position, but at some distance from the river; a proof at least that he was never there, and probably sang and lived in some very distant region :

long (almost 80 English feet), in the Cathedral; his Statue, of gigantic size, on the *Neue Thurm* (New Tower) on the Rhine"; etc., etc. "And lastly the Siegfried's Chapel, in primeval, Pre-Gothic architecture, not long since pulled down. In the time of the *Meistersängers* too, the Stadtrath was bound to give every Master, who sang the lay of Siegfried ("Meisterlied von Siegfrieden," the purport of which is now unknown), without mistake, a certain gratuity."—"Glossary to the Nibelungen," § "Worms."

One is sorry to learn that this famed Imperial City is no longer Imperial, but much fallen in every way from its palmy state; the 30,000 inhabitants, to be found there in Gustavus Adolphus' time, having now declined into some 6,800,—“who maintain themselves by wine-growing, Rhine-boats, tobacco-manufacture, and making sugar-of-lead.” So hard has war, which respects nothing, pressed on Worms, ill-placed for safety, on the hostile border, Louvois, or Louis XIV., in 1689, had it utterly devastated; whereby in the interior, “spaces that were once covered with buildings are now gardens.”—See “Conv. Lexicon,” § “Worms.”

The boats were floating ready, And many
men there were ;
What clothes of price they had They took
and stow'd them there,
Was never a rest from toiling Until the
eventide,
Then they took the flood right gaily, Would
longer not abide.

Brave tents and hutches You saw raised on
the grass,
Other side the Rhine-stream That camp it
pitched was :
The king to stay awhile, Was besought of
his fair wife ;
That night she saw him with her, And
never more in life.

Trumpets and flutes spoke out, At dawning
of the day,
That time was come for parting, So they
rose to march away :
Who loved-one had in arms Did kiss that
same, I ween ;
And fond farewells were bidden By cause
of Etzel's Queen.

Frau Ute's noble sons They had a serving-
man,
A brave one and a true : Or ever the march
began,
He speaketh to King Gunther, What for his
ear was fit,
He said : "Woe for this journey, I grieve
because of it."

He, Rumold hight, the Sewer, Was known
as hero true ;
He spake : "Whom shall this people And
land be trusted to ?
Woe on 't, will nought persuade ye, Brave
Recken, from this road !
Frau Chriemhild's flattering message No
good doth seem to bode."

"The land to thee be trusted, And my fair
boy also,
And serve thou well the women, I tell thee
ere I go ;
Whomso thou findest weeping Her heart
give comfort to ;
No harm to one of us King Etzel's wife
will do."

The steeds were standing ready, For the
Kings and for their men ;
With kisses tenderest Took leave full many
then,
Who, in gallant cheer and hope, To march
were nought afraid :
Them since that day bewaileth Many a noble
wife and maid.

But when the rapid Recken Took horse and
prickt away,
The women shent in sorrow You saw behind
them stay ;
Of parting all too long Their hearts to them
did tell ;
When grief so great is coming, The mind
forebodes not well.

Nathless the brisk Burgonden All on their
way did go,
Then rose the country over A mickle dole
and woe ;
On both sides of the hills Woman and man
did weep :
Let their folk do how they list, These gay
their course did keep.

The Nibelungen Recken* Did march with
them as well,
In a thousand glittering hauberks, Who at
home had ta'en farewell
Of many a fair woman Should see them
never more :
The wound of her brave Siegfried Did grieve
Chriemhilde sore.

Then 'gan they shape their journey Towards
the River Maine,
All on through East Franconia, King Gun-
ther and his train ;
Hagen he was their leader, Of old did know
the way ;
Dankwart did keep, as marshal, Their ranks
in good array.

As they, from East Franconia, The Salfield
rode along,

* These are the Nibelungen proper who had come to Worms with Siegfried, on the famed bridal journey from Isenstein, long ago. Observe, at the same time, that ever since the *Nibelungen Hoard* was transferred to the Rhineland, the whole subjects of King Gunther are often called Nibelungen, and their subsequent history is this " Nibelungen Song."

Might you have seen them prancing, A
bright and lordly throng,
The Princes and their vassals, All heroes of
great fame :
The twelfth morn brave King Gunther Unto
the Donau came.

Then rode Von Troneg Hagen, The foremost
of that host,
He was to the Nibelungen The guide they
lov'd the most :
The Ritter keen dismounted, Set foot on
the sandy ground,
His steed to a tree he tied, Looked wistful
all around.

“Much scaith,” Von Troneg said, “May
lightly chance to thee,
King Gunther, by this tide, As thou with
eyes mayst see :
The river is overflowing, Full strong runs
here its stream,
For crossing of this Donau Some counsel
might well beseem.”

“What counsel hast thou, brave Hagen,”
King Gunther then did say,

“Of thy own wit and cunning? Dishearten
me not, I pray :
Thyself the ford wilt find us, If knightly
skill it can,
That safe to yondershore We may pass both
horse and man.”

“To me, I trow,” spake Hagen, “Life hath
not grown so cheap,
To go with will and drown me In riding
these waters deep ;
But first, of men some few By this hand of
mine shall die,
In great King Etzel’s country, As best
good-will have I.

“But bide ye here by the River, Ye Ritters
brisk and sound,
Myself will seek some boatman, If boatman
here be found,
To row us at his ferry, Across to Gelfrat’s
land :”
The Troneger grasped his buckler, Fared
forth along the strand.

He was full bravely harness'd, Himself he
knightly bore,
With buckler and with helmet, Which
bright enough he wore;
And, bound above his hauberk, A weapon
broad was seen,
That cut with both its edges, Was never
sword so keen.

Then hither he and thither Search'd for
the Ferryman,
He heard a splashing of waters, To watch
the same he 'gan,
It was the white Mer-women, That in a
fountain clear,
To cool their fair bodyes, Were merrily
bathing here.

From these Mer-women, who "skim-
med aloof like white cygnets" at sight
of him, Hagen snatches up "their won-
drous raiment"; on condition of return-
ing which, they rede him his fortune;
how his expedition is to speed. At
first favorably :

She said : "To Etzel's country Of a truth
ye well may hie,
For here I pledge my hand, Now kill me if
I lie,
That heroes seeking honor Did never arrive
thereat
So richly as ye shall do, Believe thou
surely that."

But no sooner is the wondrous raiment restored them than they change their tale ; for in spite of that matchless honor, it appears every one of the adventurous Recken is to perish.

Outspake the wild Mer-woman : "I tell
thee it will arrive,
Of all your gallant host No man shall be
left alive,
Except King Gunther's chaplain, As we
full well do know ;
He only, home returning, To the Rhine-
land back shall go."

Then spake Von Troneg Hagen, His wrath
did fiercely swell :

“Such tidings to my master I were right
loath to tell,

That in King Etzel’s country We all must
lose our life :

Yet show me over the water, Thou wise
all-knowing *wife*.”

Thereupon, seeing him bent on ruin,
she gives directions how to find the
ferry, but withal counsels him to deal
warily ; the ferry-house stands on the
other side of the river ; the boat-
man, too, is not only the hottest-tem-
pered of men, but rich and indolent ;
nevertheless, if nothing else will serve,
let Hagen call himself Amelrich, and
that will bring him. All happens as
predicted : the boatman, heedless of
all shouting and offers of gold clasps,
bestirs him lustily at the name of Amel-
rich ; but the more indignant is he, on

taking-in his fare, to find it counterfeit.
He orders Hagen, if he loves his life,
to leap out.

“Now say not that,” spake Hagen ; “Right
hard am I bested,
Take from me for good friendship This
clasp of gold so red ;
And row our thousand heroes And steeds
across this river,”
Then spake the wrathful boatman, “That
will I surely never.”

Then one of his oars he lifted, Right broad
it was and long,
He struck it down on Hagen, Did the hero
mickle wrong,
That in the boat he staggered, And alighted
on his knee ;
Other such wrathful boatman, Did never
the Troneger see.

His proud unbidden guest He would now
provoke still more,

He struck his head so stoutly That it broke
 in twain the oar,
With strokes on head of Hagen ; He was a
 sturdy wight :
Nathless had Gelfrat's boatman Small profit
 of that fight.

With fiercely raging spirit The Troneger
 turn'd him round,
Clutch'd quick enough his scabbard, And a
 weapon there he found ;
He smote his head from off him, And cast
 it on the sand,
Thus had that wrathful boatman His death
 from Hagen's hand.

Even as Von Troneg Hagen The wrathful
 boatman slew,
The boat whirl'd round to the river, He had
 work enough to do :
Or ever he turn'd it shorewards, To weary
 he began,
But kept full stoutly rowing. The bold King
 Gunther's man.

He wheel'd it back, brave Hagen, With
many a lusty stroke,
The strong oar, with such rowing, In his
hand asunder broke ;
He fain would reach the Recken, All wait-
ing on the shore,
No tackle now he had ; Hei,* how deftly he
spliced the oar,

With thong from off his buckler ! It was a
slender band ;
Right over against a forest He drove the
boat to land ;
Where Gunther's Recken waited, In crowds
along the beach ;
Full many a goodly hero Moved down his
boat to reach.

* These apparently insignificant circumstances, down even to mending the oar from his shield, are preserved with a singular fidelity in the most distorted editions of the Tale ; see, for example, the Danish ballad, "Lady Grimhild's Wrack" (translated in the "Northern Antiquities," p. 275, by Mr. Jamieson). This "Hei !" is a brisk interjection, whereby the worthy old Singer now and then introduces his own person, when any thing very eminent is going forward.

Hagen ferries them over himself "into the unknown land," like a right yare steersman; yet ever brooding fiercely on that prediction of the wild Mer-woman, which had outdone even his own dark forebodings. Seeing the Chaplain, who alone of them all was to return, standing in the boat beside his *chappelsoume* (pyxes and other sacred furniture), he determines to belie at least this part of the prophecy, and on a sudden hurls the chaplain overboard. Nay, as the poor priest swims after the boat, he pushes him down, regardless of all remonstrance, resolved that he shall die. Nevertheless it proved not so: the chaplain made for the other side; when his strength failed, "then God's hand helped him," and at length he reached the shore. Thus does the stern truth stand revealed to Hagen, by the very means he took for eluding

it: "he thought with himself these Recken must all lose their lives." From this time, a grim, reckless spirit takes possession of him; a courage, an audacity, waxing more and more into the fixed strength of desperation. The passage once finished, he dashes the boat in pieces, and casts it in the stream, greatly as the others wonder at him.

"Why do ye this, good brother?" Said the
Ritter Dankwart then;
"How shall we cross this river, When the
road we come again?
Returning home from Hunland, Here must
we lingering stay?"—
Not then did Hagen tell him That return
no more could they.

In this shipment "into the unknown land," there lies, for the more penetrating sort of commentators, some

hidden meaning and allusion. The destruction of the unreturning Ship, as of the Ship Argo, of Æneas' Ships, and the like, is a constant feature of such traditions. It is thought, this ferrying of the Nibelungen has a reference to old Scandinavian Mythuses ; nay, to the oldest, most universal emblems shaped out by man's Imagination ; Hagen the ferryman being, in some sort, a type of Death, who ferries over his thousands and tens of thousands into a Land still more unknown.*

But leaving these considerations, let us remark the deep, fearful interest which, in gathering strength, rises to a really tragical height in the close of this Poem. Strangely has the old Singer, in these his loose melodies, modulated the wild narrative into a

* See Von der Hagen's " Nibelungen, ihre Bedeutung," etc.

poetic whole, with what we might call true art, were it not rather an instinct of genius still more unerring. A fateful gloom now hangs over the fortunes of the Nibelungen, which deepens and deepens as they march onwards to the judgment-bar, till all are engulfed in utter night.

Hagen himself rises in tragic greatness ; so helpful, so prompt and strong is he, and true to the death, though without hope. If sin can ever be pardoned, then that one act of his is pardonable ; by loyal faith, by free daring and heroic constancy, he has made amends for it. Well does he know what is coming ; yet he goes forth to meet it, offers to Ruin his sullen welcome. Warnings thicken on him, which he treats lightly, as things now superfluous. Spite of our love for Siegfried, we must pity and almost

respect the lost Hagen now in his extreme need, and fronting it so nobly. "Mixed was his hair with a gray color, his limbs strong, and threatening his look." Nay, his sterner qualities are beautifully tempered by another feeling, of which till now we understood not that he was capable,—the feeling of friendship. There is a certain Volker of Alsace here introduced, not for the first time, yet first in decided energy, who is more to Hagen than a brother. This Volker, a courtier and noble, is also a *Spielmann* (minstrel), a *Fidelere gut* (fiddler good); and surely the prince of all *Fideleres*; in truth a very phoenix, melodious as the soft nightingale, yet strong as the royal eagle: for also in the brunt of battle he can play tunes; and with a *Steel Fiddlebow* beats strange music from the cleft helmets of his enemies. There is, in this con-

tinual allusion to Volker's *Schwert-fidelbogen* (Sword-fiddlebow), as rude as it sounds to us, a barbaric greatness and depth ; the light minstrel of kingly and queenly halls is gay also in the storm of Fate ; its dire rushing pipes and whistles to him : is he not the image of every brave man fighting with Necessity, be that duel when and where it may ; smiting the fiend with giant strokes, yet every stroke *musical* ? —This Volker and Hagen are united inseparably, and defy death together. “Whatever Volker said pleased Hagen ; whatever Hagen did pleased Volker.”

But into these last *Ten Aventiures*, almost like the image of a Doomsday, we must hardly glance at present. Seldom, perhaps, in the poetry of that or any other age, has a grander scene of pity and terror been exhibited

than here, could we look into it clearly. At every new step new shapes of fear arise. Dietrich of Bern meets the Nibelungen on their way, with ominous warnings : but warnings, as we said, are now superfluous, when the evil itself is apparent and inevitable. Chriemhild, wasted and exasperated here into a frightful Medea, openly threatens Hagen, but is openly defied by him ; he and Volker retire to a seat before her palace, and sit there, while she advances in angry tears, with a crowd of armed Huns, to destroy them. But Hagen has Siegfried's Balmung lying naked on his knee, the Minstrel also has drawn his keen Fiddlebow, and the Huns dare not provoke the battle. Chriemhild would fain single out Hagen for vengeance ; but Hagen, like other men, stands not alone ; and sin is an infection which will not rest

with one victim. Partakers or not of his crime, the others also must share his punishment. Singularly touching, in the meanwhile, is King Etzel's ignorance of what every one else understands too well ; and how, in peaceful, hospitable spirit, he exerts himself to testify his joy over these royal guests of his, who are bidden hither for far other ends. That night the wayworn Nibelungen are sumptuously lodged ; yet Hagen and Volker see good to keep watch. Volker plays them to sleep. " Under the porch of the house he sat on the stone : bolder fiddler was there never any ; when the tones flowed so sweetly, they all gave him thanks. Then sounded his strings till all the house rang ; his strength and the art were great ; sweeter and sweeter he began to play, till flitted forth from him into sleep full many a careworn

soul." It was their last lullaby ; they were to sleep no more. Armed men appear, but suddenly vanish, in the night ; assassins sent by Chriemhild, expecting no sentinel : it is plain that the last hour draws nigh.

In the morning the Nibelungen are for the Minster to hear mass ; they are putting on gay raiment ; but Hagen tells them a different tale : " ye must take other garments, Recken ; instead of silk shirts hauberks, for rich mantles your good shields ; and, beloved masters, moreover squires and men, ye shall full earnestly go to the church, and plain to God the powerful (*Got dem richen*) of your sorrow and utmost need ; and know of a surety that death for us is nigh." In Etzel's Hall, where the Nibelungen appear at the royal feast in complete armor, the Strife, incited by Chriemhild, be-

gins ; the first answer to her provocation is from Hagen, who hews off the head of her own and Etzel's son, making it bound into the mother's bosom : " then began among the Recken a murder grim and great." Dietrich, with a voice of preternatural power, commands pause ; retires with Etzel and Chriemhild ; and now the bloody work has free course. We have heard of battles, and massacres, and deadly struggles in siege and storm ; but seldom has even the poet's imagination pictured any thing so fierce and terrible as this. Host after host, as they enter that huge vaulted Hall, perish in conflict with the doomed Nibelungen ; and ever after the terrific uproar, ensues a still more terrific silence. All night and through morning it lasts. They throw the dead from the windows ; blood runs like

water ; the Hall is set fire to, they quench it with blood, their own burning thirst they slake with blood. It is a tumult like the Crack of Doom, a thousand-voiced, wild-stunning hubbub ; and, frightful like a Trump of doom, the *Sword-fiddlebow* of Volker, who guards the door, makes music to that death-dance. Nor are traits of heroism wanting, and thrilling tones of pity and love ; as in that act of Rudiger, Etzel's and Chriemhild's champion, who, bound by oath, "lays his soul in God's hand," and enters that Golgotha to die fighting against his friends ; yet first changes shields with Hagen, whose own, also given him by Rudiger in a far other hour, had been shattered in the fight. "When he so lovingly bade give him the shield, there were eyes enough red with hot tears ; it was the last gift which Rudi-

ger of Bechelaren gave to any Recke. As grim as Hagen was, and as hard of mind, he wept at this gift which the hero good, so near his last times, had given him ; full many a noble Ritter began to weep."

At last Volker is slain ; they are all slain, save only Hagen and Gunther, faint and wounded, yet still unconquered among the bodies of the dead. Dietrich the wary, though strong and invincible, whose Recken too, except old Hildebrand, he now finds are all killed, though he had charged them strictly not to mix in the quarrel, at last arms himself to finish it. He subdues the two wearied Nibelungen, binds them, delivers them to Chriemhild ; "and Herr Dietrich went away with weeping eyes, worthily from the heroes." These never saw each other more. Chriemhild demands of Hagen,

Where the Nibelungen Hoard is? But he answers her, that he has sworn never to disclose it while any of her brothers live. "I bring it to an end," said the infuriated woman; orders her brother's head to be struck off, and holds it up to Hagen. "'Thou hast it now according to thy will,' said Hagen; 'of the Hoard knoweth none but God and I; from thee, she-devil (*valendinne*), shall it forever be hid.'"

She kills him with his own sword, once her husband's; and is herself struck dead by Hildebrand, indignant at the woe she has wrought; King Etzel, there present, not opposing the deed. Whereupon the curtain drops over that wild scene. "The full highly honored were lying dead; the people all had sorrow and lamentation; in grief had the king's feast ended, as all love is wont to do."

*Ine chan in nicht bescheiden Waz sider da
geschach,
Wan ritter unde wroven Weinen man do
sach,
Dar-zuo die edeln chnechte Ir lieben vri-
unde tot :
Da hat das mære ein ende ; Diz ist der
Nibelunge not.*

I cannot say you now What hath befallen
since ;
The women all were weeping, And the Rit-
ters and the prince,
Also the noble squires, Their dear friends
lying dead :
Here hath the story ending ; This is the
Nibelungen's Need.

We have now finished our slight analysis of this Poem ; and hope that readers who are curious in this matter, and ask themselves, What is the " Nibelungen " ? may have here found some outlines of an answer, some help

towards farther researches of their own. To such readers another question will suggest itself: Whence this singular production comes to us, When and How it originated? On which point also, what little light our investigation has yielded may be summarily given.

The worthy Von der Hagen, who may well understand the "Nibelungen" better than any other man, having rendered it into the modern tongue, and twice edited it in the original, not without collating some eleven manuscripts, and travelling several thousands of miles to make the last edition perfect,—writes a Book some years ago, rather boldly denominated "The Nibelungen, its Meaning for the present and forever"; wherein, not content with any measurable antiquity of centuries, he would fain claim an antiquity beyond all bounds of dated

time. Working his way with feeble mine-lamps of etymology and the like, he traces back the rudiments of his beloved "Nibelungen," "to which the flower of his whole life has been consecrated," into the thick darkness of the Scandinavian *Niflheim* and *Muspelheim*, and the Hindoo Cosmogony ; connecting it farther (as already in part we have incidentally pointed out) with the Ship *Argo*, with Jupiter's goatskin *Ægis*, the fire-creed of *Zer-dusht*, and even with the heavenly Constellations. His reasoning is somewhat abstruse ; yet an honest zeal, very considerable learning and intellectual force bring him tolerably through. So much he renders plausible or probable, that in the "Nibelungen," under more or less defacement, lie fragments, scattered like mysterious Runes, yet still in part decipherable,

of the earliest Thoughts of men ; that the fiction of the " Nibelungen " was at first a religious or philosophical Mythus ; and only in later ages, incorporating itself more or less completely with vague traditions of real events, took the form of a story, or mere Narrative of earthly transactions ; in which last form, moreover, our actual " Nibelungen Lied " is nowise the original Narrative, but the second, or even the third redaction of one much earlier.

At what particular era the primeval fiction of the " Nibelungen " passed from its Mythological into its Historical shape ; and the obscure spiritual elements of it wedded themselves to the obscure remembrances of the Northern Immigrations ; and the Twelve Signs of the Zodiac became Twelve Champions of Attila's Wife,

—there is no fixing with the smallest certainty. It is known from history that Eginhart, the secretary of Charlemagne, compiled, by order of that monarch, a collection of the ancient German Songs; among which, it is fondly believed by antiquaries, this “Nibelungen” (not indeed our actual “Nibelungen Lied,” yet an older one of similar purport), and the main traditions of the “Heldenbuch” connected therewith, may have had honorable place. Unluckily Eginhart’s Collection has quite perished, and only his Life of the Great Charles, in which this circumstance stands noted, survives to provoke curiosity. One thing is certain, Fulco, Archbishop of Rheims, in the year 885, is introduced as “citing certain German books,” to enforce some argument of his by instance of “King Ermerich’s crime toward his

relations''; which King Ermerich and his crime are at this day part and parcel of the "Cycle of German Fiction," and presupposed in the "Nibelungen.*" Later notices, of a more decisive sort, occur in abundance. Saxo Grammaticus, who flourished in the twelfth century, relates that about the year 1130, a Saxon Minstrel being sent to Seeland, with a treacherous invitation from one royal Dane to another; and not daring to violate his oath, yet compassionating the victim, sang to him by way of indirect warning "the Song of Chriemhild's Treachery to her Brothers"; that is to say, the latter portion of the Story which we still read at greater length in the existing "Nibelungen Lied." To which direct evidence, that these traditions were universally known in the twelfth

* Von der Hagen's "Nibelungen" Einleitung, § vii.

century, nay, had been in some shape committed to writing, as "German Books," in the ninth or rather in the eighth,—we have still to add the probability of there being "ancient songs," even at that earliest date; all which may perhaps carry us back into the seventh or even sixth century; yet not farther, inasmuch as certain of the poetic personages that figure in them belong historically to the fifth.

Other and more open proof of antiquity lies in the fact, that these Traditions are so universally diffused. There are Danish and Icelandic versions of them, externally more or less altered and distorted, yet substantially real copies, professing indeed to be borrowed from the German; in particular we have the "Niflinga" and the "Wilkina Saga," composed in the thirteenth century, which still in many

ways illustrate the German original. Innumerable other songs and sagas point more remotely in the same direction. Nay, as Von der Hagen informs us, certain rhymed tales, founded on these old adventures, have been recovered from popular recitation, in the Faroe Islands, within these few years.

If we ask now, What lineaments of Fact still exist in these Traditions; what are the Historical events and persons which our primeval Mythuses have here united with, and so strangely metamorphosed? the answer is unsatisfactory enough. The great Northern Immigrations, unspeakably momentous and glorious as they were for the Germans, have wellnigh faded away utterly from all vernacular records. Some traces, nevertheless, some names and dim shadows of occurrences in that grand movement, still linger

here ; which, in such circumstances, we gather with avidity. There can be no doubt, for example, but this “Etzel, king of Hunland,” is the Attila of history, several of whose real achievements and relations are faintly yet still recognizably pictured forth in these Poems. Thus his first queen is named Halke, and in the Scandinavian versions, Herka ; which last (Erca) is also the name that Priscus gives her, in the well-known account of his embassy to Attila. Moreover, it is on his second marriage, which had in fact so mysterious and tragical a character, that the whole catastrophe of the “Nibelungen” turns. It is true, the “Scourge of God” plays but a tame part here ; however, his great acts, though all past, are still visible in their fruits ; besides, it is on the Northern or Ger-

man personages that the tradition chiefly dwells.

Taking further into account the general "Cycle," or System of Northern Tradition, whereof this "Nibelungen" is the centre and keystone, there is, as we saw in the "Heldenbuch," a certain Kaiser Ottnit and a Dietrich of Bern; to whom also it seems unreasonable to deny historical existence. This *Bern* (Verona), as well as the *Rabenschlacht* (Battle of Ravenna), is continually figuring in these fictions; though whether under Ottnit we are to understand Odoacer the vanquished, and under Dietrich of Bern Theodoricus Veronensis, the victor both at Verona and Ravenna, is by no means so indubitable. Chronological difficulties stand much in the way. For our Dietrich of Bern, as we saw in the "Nibelungen," is repre-

sented as one of Etzel's Champions. Now Attila died about the year 450 ; and this Ostrogoth Theodoric did not fight his great battle at Verona till 489 ; that of Ravenna, which was followed by a three years' siege, happening next year. So that before Dietrich could become Dietrich *of Bern*, Etzel had been gone almost half a century from the scene. Startled by this anachronism, some commentators have fished out another Theodoric, eighty years prior to him of Verona, and who actually served in Attila's hosts, with a retinue of Goths and Germans ; with which new Theodoric, however, the old Ottnit, or Odoacer, of the " *Heldenbuch* " must, in his turn, part company ; whereby the case is no whit mended. Certain it seems, in the meantime, that *Dietrich*, which signifies *Rich in People*, is the same name

which in Greek becomes Theodoricus ; for at first (as in Procopius) this very *Theodoricus* is always written Θεωδερικ, which almost exactly corresponds with the German sound. But such are the inconsistencies involved in both hypotheses, that we are forced to conclude one of two things : either that the Singers of those old Lays were little versed in the niceties of History, and unambitious of passing for authorities therein, which seems a remarkably easy conclusion ; or else, with Lessing, that they meant some quite other series of persons and transactions, some Kaiser Otto, and his two Anti-Kaisers (in the twelfth century) ; which, from what has come to light since Lessing's day, seems now an untenable position.

However, as concerns the " Nibelungen," the most remarkable coincidence,

if genuine, remains yet to be mentioned. "Thwartz," a Hungarian Chronicler (or perhaps Chronicle), of we know not what authority, relates, "that Attila left his kingdom to his two sons Chaba and Aladar, the former by a Grecian mother, the latter by Kremheilch (Chriemhild) a German ; that Theodoric, one of his followers, sowed dissension between them ; and, along with the Teutonic hosts, took part with his half-countryman the younger son ; whereupon rose a great slaughter, which lasted for fifteen days, and terminated in the defeat of Chaba (the Greek), and his flight into Asia." * Could we but put faith in this Thwartz, we might fancy that some vague rumor of that Kremheilch

* Weber (" Illustrations of Northern Antiquities," p. 39), who cites Görres (" Zeitung für Einsiedler ") as his authority.

Tragedy, swoln by the way, had reached the German ear and imagination ; where, gathering round older Ideas and Mythuses, as Matter round its Spirit, the first rude form of *Chriemhilde's Revenge and the Wreck of the Nibelungen* bodied itself forth in Song.

Thus any historical light emitted by these old Fictions is little better than darkness visible ; sufficient at most to indicate that great Northern Immigrations, and wars and rumors of war have been ; but nowise how and what they have been. Scarcely clearer is the special history of the Fictions themselves ; where they were first put together, who have been their successive redactors and new-modellers. Von der Hagen, as we said, supposes that there may have been three several series of such. Two, at all events, are

clearly indicated. In their present shape we have internal evidence that none of these poems can be older than the twelfth century ; indeed, great part of the "Hero-book" can be proved to be considerably later. With this last it is understood that Wolfram von Eschenbach and Heinrich von Ofterdingen, two singers otherwise noted in that era, were largely concerned ; but neither is there any demonstration of this vague belief : while again, in regard to the Author of our actual "Nibelungen," not so much as a plausible conjecture can be formed.

Some vote for a certain Conrad von Wurzburg ; others for the above-named Eschenbach and Ofterdingen ; others again for Klingsohr of Ungerland, a minstrel who once passed for a magician. Against all and each of which hypotheses there are objections ;

and for none of them the smallest conclusive evidence. Who this gifted singer may have been, only in so far as his Work itself proves that there was but One, and the style points to the latter half of the twelfth century,—remains altogether dark : the unwearied Von der Hagen himself, after fullest investigation, gives for verdict, “we know it not.” Considering the high worth of the “Nibelungen,” and how many feeble ballad-mongers of that *Swabian Era* have transmitted us their names, so total an oblivion, in this infinitely more important case, may seem surprising. But those *Minnelieder* (Love-songs) and Provençal Madrigals were the Court Poetry of that time, and gained honor in high places ; while the old National Traditions were common property and plebeian, and to sing them an unrewarded labor.

Whoever he may be, let him have our gratitude, our love. Looking back with a farewell glance, over that wondrous old Tale, with its many-colored texture "of joyances and high-tides, of weeping and of woe," so skilfully yet artlessly knit-up into a whole, we cannot but repeat that a true epic spirit lives in it ; that in many ways it has meaning and charms for us. Not only as the oldest Tradition of Modern Europe, does it possess a high antiquarian interest ; but further, and even in the shape we now see it under, unless the " Epics of the Son of Fingal " had some sort of authenticity, it is our oldest Poem also ; the earliest product of these New Ages, which on its own merits, both in form and essence, can be named Poetical. Considering its chivalrous, romantic tone, it may rank as a piece of literary com-

position, perhaps considerably higher than the Spanish "Cid"; taking in its historical significance and deep ramifications into the remote Time, it ranks indubitably and greatly higher.

It has been called a Northern "Iliad"; but except in the fact that both Poems have a narrative character, and both sing "the destructive rage" of men, the two have scarcely any similarity. The Singer of the "Nibelungen" is a far different person from Homer; far inferior both in culture and in genius. Nothing of the glowing imagery, of the fierce, bursting energy, of the mingled fire and gloom, that dwell in the old Greek, makes its appearance here. The German Singer is comparatively a simple nature; has never penetrated deep into life; never "questioned Fate"; or struggled with fearful mys-

teries ; of all which we find traces in Homer, still more in Shakespeare ; but with meek, believing submission, has taken the Universe as he found it represented to him ; and rejoices with a fine childlike gladness in the mere outward shows of things. He has little power of delineating character ; perhaps he had no decisive vision thereof. His persons are superficially distinguished, and not altogether without generic difference ; but the portraiture is imperfectly brought out ; there lay no true living original within him. He has little Fancy ; we find scarcely one or two similitudes in his whole Poem ; and these one or two, which moreover are repeated, betoken no special faculty that way. He speaks of the “ moon among stars ” ; says often of sparks struck from steel armor in battle, and so forth, that they were

wie es wehte der wind—"as if the wind were blowing them." We have mentioned Tasso along with him; yet neither in this case is there any close resemblance; the light, playful grace, still more the Italian pomp and sunny luxuriance of Tasso are wanting in the other. His are humble wood-notes wild; no nightingale's, but yet a sweet sky-hidden lark's. In all the rhetorical gifts, to say nothing of rhetorical attainments, we should pronounce him even poor.

Nevertheless, a noble soul he must have been, and furnished with far more essential requisites for Poetry than these are—namely, with the heart and feeling of a Poet. He has a clear eye for the Beautiful and True; all unites itself gracefully and compactly in his imagination. It is strange with what careless felicity he winds his way

in that complex Narrative, and, be the subject what it will, comes through it unsullied, and with a smile. His great strength is an unconscious instinctive strength ; wherein truly lies his highest merit. The whole spirit of Chivalry, of Love, and heroic Valor must have lived in him and inspired him. Everywhere he shows a noble Sensibility ; the sad accents of parting friends, the lamentings of women, the high daring of men, all that is worthy and lovely prolongs itself in melodious echoes through his heart. A true old Singer, and taught of Nature herself ! Neither let us call him an inglorious Milton, since now he is no longer a mute one. What good were it that the four or five Letters composing his Name could be printed, and pronounced, with absolute certainty ? All that was mortal in him is gone utterly ;

of his life, and its environment, as of the bodily tabernacle he dwelt in, the very ashes remain not. Like a fair heavenly Apparition, which indeed he *was*, he has melted into air, and only the Voice he uttered, in virtue of its inspired gift, yet lives and will live.

To the Germans this "Nibelungen Song" is naturally an object of no common love; neither if they sometimes overvalue it, and vague antiquarian wonder is more common than just criticism, should the fault be too heavily visited. After long ages of concealment, they have found it in the remote wilderness, still standing like the trunk of some almost antediluvian oak; nay with boughs on it still green, after all the wind and weather of twelve hundred years. To many a patriotic feeling, which lingers fondly in solitary places of the Past,

it may well be a rallying-point and "Lovers' *Trysting-tree*."

For us also it has its worth. A creation from the old ages, still bright and balmy, if we visit it ; and opening into the first History of Europe, of Mankind. Thus all is not oblivion ; but on the edge of the abyss that separates the Old world from the New, there hangs a fair Rainbow-land ; which also, in curious repetitions of itself (*twice* over, say the critics), as it were in a secondary and even a ternary reflex, sheds some feeble twilight far into the deeps of the primeval Time.

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